

COVID-19 Update - March 12, 2020

Brothers and Sisters,

The VPFPA Executive Board and Health & Safety Committee would like to provide the following updates on the emergence of the current pandemic and what is being done for our members.

Tyler and I first started addressing this issue on January 20th - the result of this was the addition of the CoronaVirus for discussion at the joint H&S meeting on January 22nd. As the only action items were investigating the robustness of our current gowns and the immediate start of fit testing that had been scheduled for January 2019. At this initial discussion, the employer reps remained focused on a "wait and see" approach. Both PPE standards and fit testing subsequently remained ignored for an additional 5 weeks.

It wasn't until March 1st that the Fire Chief instituted an action plan to secure additional and contingency PPE, as well as institute a robust fit testing schedule. These initiatives were done in consultation with the Health & Safety committee as well as the Executive Board.

On March 3rd, it was recognized that normal PPE would be unavailable for procurement. The Fire Chief presented, to both the Association and Health & Safety, the desire to make an emergency purchase of respirator masks with medical grade filters. It should be noted that this action has created a resiliency strategy available for Vaughan Firefighters that does not exist in other municipalities. Fit testing has been also implemented to ensure that these masks will protect firefighters at calls.

On March 5th, the worker group of the H&S committee was able to meet to discuss a comprehensive list of recommendations to both the employer, as well as the Association, based on issues beyond the current Health & Safety Terms of Reference and Green Book. Both the Association and H&S inquired about quarantine and isolation issues, as well as how our currently agreed-to and unilaterally implemented medical substantiation initiatives would be dealt with moving forward. The Association has tried to be proactive in limiting member exposure to illness and reducing unnecessary health care system burdens for medical notes during this time. I was informed five days later that the administration was working on it. I have moved these discussions to the Chief Human Resource Officer and Director of HR. We have had some initial like-minded, responsible conversations yesterday afternoon and we are scheduled for a follow-up tomorrow morning. It is my desire to suspend the Attendance Support Program during the pandemic and create internal common sense solutions to medical substantiation for non flu-like absences, functional ability assessments for modified work and a review of then emerging WSIB issues that will most likely become a reality.

On March 9th, Health and Safety was brought into the JOC to aid in research, discussion and ensuring that the measures and steps being taken are appropriate and accurate based on the latest direction from the Ministry of Health. This involved discussion pertaining to the decrease of community events, upgrading the questionnaire for patients as well as decontamination of new respirators and investigation if other cleaning material or equipment would be needed. We are happy to disclose that the confidence plus solution and station cleaning solutions are appropriate in eliminating the virus from contaminated equipment.

Items of continued focus and discussion are available equipment and level of protection, decontamination, exposure of firefighters and mixed EMS/Fire stations, quarantine and isolation challenges if needed.

We continue to engage and work with the VFRS Management team as well as City Representatives on the widespread and changing dynamic presented to our brothers and sisters with this global outbreak.

Mark Wilson, VPFFA President

Tyler Solonenko - H&S Co-Chair