



# International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Vancouver Island

Quarterly Newsletter Since 1902

## Special Report on COVID – 19

### The Virus:

COVID-19 is the illness caused by the novel coronavirus. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that can be transmitted typically from one animal to another, or from one human to another. In humans, often associated to the common cold. COVID-19 is a new disease, the third coronavirus that has spread from animal to human, (SARS and MERS) causing severe illness in humans. On March 11th, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic.

### Declared State of Emergency:

On Tuesday March 17th, BC Solicitor General Mike Farnsworth declared a Provincial State of Emergency. That allowed the government to control its citizens travel, procure, fix prices and ration food, medical supplies and other essential products they deem necessary. As well as compelling qualified people to render assistance. The BC Minister of Health and Dr. Bonnie Henry have asked that all gatherings larger than 50 people be cancelled. People who have returned from traveling outside of Canada are being asked to self-isolate for 14 days upon their return. On March 26th the federal government initiated the Quarantine Act requiring those returning to the Country to self-isolate at home or face the consequences which may include jail time.

### Our Health:

COVID-19 common symptoms include difficulty in breathing, fever, coughing, sore throat, and sneezing. If you develop these symptoms, isolate yourself from others. Go on to the BC Provincial website self-assessment tool at: <https://covid19.thrive.health/> or by phone at 811 a health professional or local health

authority. Describe your symptoms and travel history and you will be assessed and provided with important medical advice on your next steps.

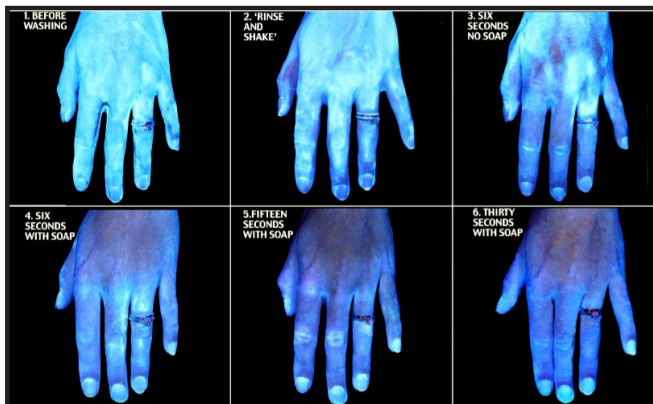
The Virus can last in the air typically for a few hours; on Copper 4 hours; on Cardboard 24 hours; and on Stainless Steel and plastics 72-hours or even longer.

### To protect yourself from infection:

Wash your hands often with soap for at least 20 seconds; If soap and water are not available use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Don't touch your face, eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands. Cover your nose and mouth with the inside of your elbow when you cough or sneeze, stay home if you're sick, and change-up usual greetings like handshakes and hugs, for eye contact, a smile or wave.

Don't share food or utensils. Clean and disinfect surfaces and common or frequent touch-points.

At this point it is our Civic Responsibility to do what we can to slow the transmission rate or soften the curve by; remaining self-isolated at home, only go out for essential needs, while at home get out in the garden, go fishing or golfing, catch up on the work around the house, do a little gaming or online binge streaming on Netflix, AppleTV or Disney+, get out and go for a hike. Remember to keep your "social" or physical distance to 2 metres (six feet).



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## News & Notes

members to consider the deep and difficult consequences that will come if we do not limit our social interactions over the next month to help curb the fatalities in our communities. Please self-isolate whenever possible, keep your distance from others when you are out, stay safe and we will get through this.

Due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, the BC Health Officer has ordered it unsafe to gather with more than 50 people at any one meeting place, as well as require two metre physical distancing. Our Unit Meeting venues have shuttered their doors due to his declaration. Therefore, the Executive Board has suspended all Unit Meetings until these orders change. This has been done with the health and safety of our membership as the number one priority.

Local 230 Office is also closed to the public until further notice.



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Vancouver Island

## Our Office:

In early March around the onset of COVID-19 in Canada, many of our staff were exposed to a person on a Friday afternoon, who a couple days later showed COVID-19 symptoms and checked themselves into the hospital, and they were thoughtful enough to let us know. In my mind, we had no other choice but to close the office. Our Local 230 staff have continued to work and practice physical distancing in the office. The person who showed all the symptoms 11 days later was confirmed negative, however, those 11 days provided the time to change our world, as we watched the global spread, the declaration of a world pandemic, countries and states close their borders, the infected and the death toll rise. We all continue to work from the office at this point, with the exception of Christian, who requested to take an unrelated Leave of Absence in late February. So, we are down one staff member looking after the Marine Section. At this time, Cory is handling all dispatch and lay-off matters in the marine section, while I've been handling everything else related to that section, and will continue to do so over the next few months.

### The Work Picture

The construction market has been uncertain to say the least. Some projects are shutting down, and some projects are crewing up. Some companies have had 3/4's of their workforce quarantined. One thing for sure this is not business as usual. Service vans are being equipped with hand sanitizer, Lysol type wipes, Tyvek throw-away onesie's all to help fight the spread. Our initial concern was making our members safe by employing WorksafeBC's



Brother Ken P. working at the Parkville Water Treatment Plant

section 4.85, and our collective agreement, by sending off a letter to our contractors on March 11th.

On March 26th the BC Government, under the Emergency Program Act under the declared state of emergency, produced their essential services list and construction and maintenance, as well as employees who repair vessels, and more. Essentially, our entire working membership under this declaration are deemed essential at this point in time.

Regardless how bad things get going forward, there will be a segment of our membership necessary, or critical to keeping our society stable, keeping the power on, tel/data lines operating, sewage pumps pumping, hospitals and assisted living operating properly, street signals lights moving from green to red, and more.

The marine market is something different with Victoria Shipyard having 3 distinct contracts between the Canadian and New Zealand Navy. These naval vessels are required for the safety and security of both nations, while at the same time workers'

rights cannot be ignored primarily due to the confined spacing associated to working on these vessels. Safe "social" or physical distancing simply cannot be achieved on-board many areas of any vessel. They are designed for the size of a ship's crew, not a trades workforce while in the process of refurbish or repair, let alone during a global pandemic.

Rebalancing crews to 2 or 3 shifts will help, as well as staggering coffee and lunch breaks for both the construction and marine industries, maybe even split the crews in half working one week on and one week off, while claiming EI on the "off week".

We may still likely see mass lay-offs around Vancouver Island companies like most North American cities. We will also be some of the first to get back to work when the weather warms and the spread or transmission curve slows.

### Right of Recall

When the work returns, I've drafted a "Right of Recall" document and sent out to our contractors, designed to simply return any of our members who were displaced in any way due to COVID-19 back to work with their previous employer, under the same "name" or "book" call designation. This was written in consideration of the Employment Standards Regulations change on March 23rd, allowing workers to be on "Leave" due to the COVID-19 spread.

We have a considerable amount of work on our books and most should return to work fairly quick, when life returns to normal. There is the obvious potential not all members on recall will not be recalled to their employer.



Thomis Service Electrician Mike K. wiring the lighting for Victoria COVID-19 testing centre.



Brother Ryan G. keeping the pedestrian and traffic signals working.



# Executive Board, Unit Meetings & Elections:

The Executive Board held an emergency meeting on March 23rd, to discuss the Provincial Health Officers order issued on the size of “gatherings”, and “social distancing”, and beyond those items in relation to our Unit Meetings, but the closure of all meeting spaces we typically use each month. So, even in the event we could hold a meeting, we have nowhere open that would accommodate us. In consideration of these things the Executive Board has suspended all Local 230 Unit Meetings until it is safe for the Local to continue to do so. The Election of Local Union Officers was also set to occur in May this year. That has also been suspended until safe to do so. The IBEW has about 900 Local Unions with most holding elections every three years, statistically 1/3 of the IBEW Local Unions are heading into an election, and this was given great thought by the IBEW International President. Both of these measures that the Local 230 Executive Board took, are endorsed by the International President as the safest way ahead, in consideration of the health of our members and their loved ones.

## Apprentice Bursaries

All apprentice bursaries have been extended by six (6) months so apprentices do not have to worry about their health to obtain the required number of Union Meetings.

## Union & Technical Training:

All upcoming Union training or technical training through Western JETS that was scheduled in the Spring will be re-scheduled to take place over the summer months. Keep in mind we also have a variety of on-line courses with Vubiz, which can keep you and your family learning while at home for hours.

On a positive note, after many hours of hard work, IBEW 230 has been accredited by Technical Safety BC for online delivery of the 8hr code update.



Doors to Halbe Hall in Black Creek where Local 230 Courtenay and Campbell River Unit members meet.

The first course is already full, the next available seats are Saturday April 18, 2020 and Saturday May 2, 2020. These courses and more are available for sign up at [www.wjets.ca](http://www.wjets.ca). This 8hr code course will satisfy the continuing educational requirements for anyone with a valid FSR. The Electrical Safety Regulation (section 10.1) from TechBC requires you to satisfy continuing education requirements before renewing your field safety representative (FSR) certificate of qualification every three years. You should renew your certificate of qualification on or before the expiry date listed on your wallet card. For example, if your certificate expires March 1, 2021, you should renew on or before March 1, 2021.

## Federal Economic Stimulus:

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau pledged \$27 Billion in direct support to Canadian workers and businesses. They will use that money to increase the Canada Child Benefit payments by \$300 per child for the 2019-20 benefit year for families who need it most. For families, increase the GST tax credits for low-and middle-income earners, provide a wage subsidy for small businesses to help them keep staff on payroll during the slow-down, pause Student Loan Payments for six months. Canada's Emergency Care Benefit will offer up to \$900 to people who don't qualify for Employment Insurance. Additionally, the one-week waiting period and medical certificate requirements for Employment Insurance have been removed. Apply online!!! The week of March 16th saw half a million Canadians applying for Employment Insurance compared to the same week in 2019 was 27,000. Service Canada workers are overloaded, and you don't have to leave home to apply.



## Free Online Homeschool Courses for Kids

**AGES 12 AND UNDER**

To receive Vubiz courses, go to the Western JETS website, log into or create an account, then the Vubiz information should appear along with other online available courses.



# Provincial Economic Stimulus:

The BC Government announced a \$5 billion aid package of income supports, tax relief and funding for people, businesses and services in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. B.C.'s plan builds on the federal government's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan.

Below is a breakdown of the funding, which is being delivered through three streams: 1) Keeping people safe and healthy; 2) Providing relief for businesses; and 3) Investing in a long-term economic plan.

## Keeping people safe and healthy

Licensed child care providers that are staying open will receive enhanced funding to keep operations going. A new B.C. Emergency Benefit for Workers will provide a tax-free \$1,000 payment to British Columbians whose ability to work has been affected by the outbreak. The benefit will be a one-time payment for British Columbians who receive federal Employment Insurance (EI), or the new federal Emergency Care Benefit or Emergency Support Benefit as a result of COVID-19 impacts. This includes workers who have been laid-off, who are sick or quarantined, parents with sick children, parents who stay at home from work while child care centres and schools are closed, and those caring for sick family members, such as an elderly parent. The workers can be EI-eligible and non-EI-eligible, such as the self-employed. The benefit will be paid to B.C. residents, in addition to their federal income supports.

The COVID-19 Action Plan takes further steps to boost income supports by increasing and expanding the B.C. Climate Action Tax Credit in July 2020. As many as 86% of British Columbians will see some extra money from this enhancement. Eligible families of four will receive up to \$564 and eligible individuals will receive up to \$218 in an enhanced payment. This boosts the regular climate action tax credit payment of up to \$112.50 per family of four, and up to \$43.50 per adult. The benefit will be a one-time payment for B.C. residents who receive federal Employment Insurance (EI), or the new federal Emergency Care Benefit, or the new federal Emergency Support Benefit.

## Support for people unable to pay monthly bills:

All evictions at BC Housing-funded buildings due to non-payment of rent have been halted.

Beginning March 30, 2020, the Province is freezing B.C. student loan payments for six months.

BC Hydro customers have the option to defer bill payments or arrange for flexible payment plans with no penalty. Customers who are dealing with job loss, illness or loss of wages due to COVID-19 will be able to use BC Hydro's Customer Crisis Fund grant program for up to \$600: <https://www.bchydro.com/index.html>



To give a little perspective of time over the last month, this is a picture of me with Premier Horgan at his desk, talking about a number of important issues (pre-pandemic) and sharing a laugh, taken on March 3rd 2020. It seems like a year ago, and I don't think either of us has had a laugh since.

ICBC customers on a monthly payment plan who are facing financial challenges due to COVID-19 may defer their payment for up to 90 days with no penalty.

More information can be found here: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/factsheets/bc-takes-steps-to-support-people-businesses-during-covid-19-pandemic>

## Banking

The big six Banks; Bank of Montreal, Canadian Imperial Bank, National Bank of Canada, Royal Bank of Canada, Bank of Nova Scotia, and, TD Bank Group have all allowed their customers to defer mortgage payments for up to six (6) months.

With further possible deferrals on a suite of other products like credit cards, loans, lines of credit and overdrafts, but will be monitoring the COVID-19 spread and impact first.

While Provincial Credit Unions are also stepping up to the challenges ahead; Community Savings is providing any of their members (cost to become a member is \$5) a six-month, no-interest loan. We are currently working with other banking institutions to see who else may help.

## Last Note:

I know you are all on information overload on COVID-19 at this point. At the same time, it was important to reach out to you in matters of our Local, our work, and passing on helpful information at this very fast fluid and anxious time. For those still working, I want to express

my concern on changing our habits, and that is up to all of us. From this point forward our homes, communities and work will all require to be looked at differently. Today, the shell of a spat out sunflower seed can be as deadly as any open panel or climbing on to the top rung of your ladder. Keeping a physical distance from your co-workers today, is what will keep you and your loved one's alive tomorrow. The days of sharing tools and equipment without wiping them down with a disinfectant are over. We need to learn a new way to look after ourselves, our co-workers and loved ones. We need to stand up and declare clean and hot running water, flush toilets and sanitary lunch rooms are as important as the job itself. With that in mind, I am encouraging all of you at any point in time are on a job with sub-standard, dirty bathrooms or lunch rooms, I want you sending me up-to-date pictures with the information of what project it's from, and they will be

forwarded on to WorksafeBC with no names attached save my own. If we are going to get through this together, construction and marine workers in British Columbia can't be considered as a third world workforce. The contracting community and Provincial Government have to declare who is responsible for this. In my mind it's simple. The General Contractor, should be able to estimate the number of workers on their project, and ensure there is adequate facilities. If they screw-up they fix it or get written up for it.

Every member has the ability to contact me by email through the Local's website.

For now, I'm asking you to limit your in-person social interactions to your family at home. This is the first time in history the human race can help save itself by simply sitting on the couch.

Stay safe, and wash often.

In Solidarity,  
Phil Venoit, RSE  
Business Manager/  
Financial Secretary