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July 20, 2021

Sisters and Brothers,

You are painfully aware of the fatal accident that took the life of our Brother Gérald Lévesque on April 1st. Since that sad day your health and safety representatives have been working tirelessly to understand the events that led to this tragedy, and to ensure efforts are made to prevent this from happening again. As a result, we have been in contact with knowledgeable authorities, in particular with Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), to ensure that appropriate corrective measures are put in place as soon as possible.

During the investigation, ESDC highlighted breaches of the company's safety measures, particularly in the identification of dangerous areas, electrical safety training, supervision of managers, work procedures, and protective equipment necessary to help prevent danger in hazardous situations. ESDC even suggested for a few weeks the possibility that all Bell technicians would be considered unqualified to work near the electrical grids, within a distance of at least 3 meters. This would have called into question the ability of our members to continue to perform their job duties. Emergency training has been set up to ensure that our members are considered qualified to continue performing their job duties. After many efforts made, ESDC finally agreed that our members were qualified, and withdrew their instruction to Bell that our technicians not be within a distance of less than 3 meters from a voltage wire. Nevertheless, ESDC maintained that many of the elements surrounding this type of work did not comply with the regulations.

Therefore, on Friday, June 4, ESDC issued the following three instructions to Bell:

1. Paragraph 125 (1) (p) Canada Labour Code (CLC) and paragraph 19.5 (1) b) Canada Occupational Health and Safety Regulations (COHSR)

The employer did not take any measures to reduce the hazards identified for work performed near live power lines, such as installing a range-limiting device or a proximity warning system on its aerial equipment fleet (bucket trucks), designating a safety watcher or implementing any other equivalent safety measure.

2. Paragraph 125 (1) (p) CLC and paragraph 19.5 (1) c) COHSR

The employer did not provide suitable safety equipment, material or devices to protect against electric shock and electrocution hazards posed by the work performed near live power lines, such as insulated approach distance sticks, insulated aerial devices (bucket trucks) or any other measure to protect its employees by insulating them from the ground.

3. Paragraph 125 (1) (p) CLC and paragraph 19.5 (1) d) COHSR

The employer neglected to develop detailed safe work procedures and methods specific to the work performed near live power lines. The information and documentation that the employer provided through its accident prevention program (APP) to guide employees as they perform their tasks does not allow them to carry out their work safely.

Therefore, you are HEREBY DIRECTED, pursuant to paragraph 145 (1) (a) of the Canada Labour Code, Part II, to terminate the contravention by July 5, 2021.

Furthermore, you are HEREBY DIRECTED, pursuant to paragraph 145 (1) (b) of the Canada Labour Code, Part II, to take the specified steps to ensure that the contravention does not continue or re-occur, by July 5, 2021.

It is understood that these instructions will force the modification of several processes and methods, as well as add additional equipment. Until long-term solutions can be put in place, ESDC will at least force the use of a safety monitor for work involving the use of a bucket.

We will continue to follow the work of ESDC with great interest and will take the necessary steps to ensure that Bell follows their instructions. Remaining vigilant is a matter of survival.

Latest developments:

Following the instructions received, an interim measure had to be put in place. Since it is not possible in the short term to develop equipment that will reduce the electrical danger (height limiter for the buckets, high-voltage warning, insulated bucket, etc.), a safety watcher procedure was developed. This measure is in effect as of July 19 and must remain in effect until technological mechanisms to eliminate the danger, or at least significantly reduce it, have been implemented.

Please pay attention to the new directives published by Bell and contact your representative on your Local Health and Safety Committees for more information.

Our Employee Representative on the local committees will be deployed in the field, in July and August, to further inform you of these new directives. Watch for future measures to be announced.

Your Union Representatives on the Corporate Health and Safety Committee,

Paul Burke
Garry Fudge
Claude Prévost
Marshall Saar
Daniel Cloutier
Vinay Sharma
Roch Leblanc

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