



January 15, 2006

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Congress

Manitoba Federation  
of Labour

Winnipeg Labour  
Council

Secretary  
Employment Standards Code Review  
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SUBMISSION TO THE EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS REVIEW  
COMMITTEE

FOR CONSIDERATION OF THE COMMITTEE

Gentlemen/ Ladies:

The Professional Paramedic Association of Winnipeg represents the City of Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service emergency medical workers commonly referred to as paramedics. Our Association membership at present is 200 + workers comprised of Primary Care, Intermediate Care, and Advanced Care paramedics as defined in the National Occupational Competency Profiles of Canada.

Our workers provide pre-hospital care to the sick and injured on a 24/7 basis. We are considered to be emergency aid providers working alongside firefighters, first responders, the men and women of law enforcement, and emergency room doctors and nurses. Our workplace is out in the field. It is considered to be pre-hospital medicine. When you dial 911 for Emergency Medical Services – pre-hospital care arrives in the form of paramedics in an ambulance.



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Our shifts are comprised of a twelve hour day. Usual shifts are 07:00 – 19:00 hours, 19:00 -07:00 hours, 10:00 – 22:00 hours, or 12:00 – 24:00 hours. It has become commonplace to leave an assigned station-house at the start of the shift and not return until the end of the day. For some the day does not end at the prescribed time; a late call often takes crews 30 minutes to 1 ½ hours beyond the end of their work day. Usually this occurs without a meal break.

The reasons for our submissions are threefold. One is to better represent our workers in our continued quest for the best working conditions possible. Secondly, it is to ensure that other emergency services workers will benefit from fair and reasonable laws and regulations. Third and most importantly, is that our patients deserve better. Our patients should not be exposed to paramedics that have been sent to call after call without a break. The likelihood of medical error increases. The Professional Paramedic Association of Winnipeg believes that the Employment Standards Code should be rewritten to reflect the modern requirements of a society with rising needs in emergency medical care and paramedics who should be allowed an appropriately healthy workplace and work-life balance.

It is our assertion that currently the work-healthy-life balance is disproportionately tipped in favour of the employer. By this remark we hope to show that increasingly, under current working conditions the paramedics working in the City of Winnipeg are missing meal breaks in the course of their work day. This is not occurring on an occasional basis but rather with an alarming frequency. It is not unusual for a paramedic crew to leave their station-house at the start of a 12 hour shift and not receive a meal break for 7, 8, or 9 hours after they have begun, if at all. Given the types of shifts and the nature of the work, hopefully what this committee will see is that this does not even meet the current “after 5 hours” indicated in the Employment Standards. While the employer enjoys uninterrupted operations... the employee suffers both physically and mentally. Physically a body cannot run on empty. It needs refuelling. Mentally, a paramedic or emergency worker cannot sustain his or her ability to operate at the level of expertise that emergency medicine and patient care demands - without a break.



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The Employer suggests that due to the operational nature of this workplace - being one of attending to emergencies - they cannot schedule breaks in the same fashion as other more stable work environments may allow. The Professional Paramedic Association of Winnipeg is not suggesting that the World should stop or all operations halt at noon so paramedics may return to their station-house and have a meal break. Rather, that the law would indicate to employers in this challenging field that a rotational meal break schedule is compulsory to allow for crews to refuel their bodies, and step away briefly from their duties.

Workplace Health & Safety agencies have recommended against eating fast food or consuming bag lunches in the ambulance for a variety of reasons. Despite their recommendations oftentimes this is the only place a crew has opportunity to eat. This would be akin to a doctor eating his or her lunch in the operating theatre – pass the scalpel, pass the mayo would not be tolerated. Nursing staff juggling a taco salad while preparing an IV? Certainly this would not be allowed. Police munching on a hotdog while deciding whether a Taser or talk is the best way to negotiate with a criminal? Without doubt this would not happen. Neither should eating a sandwich while attempting to pilot an ambulance with lights and siren through rush hour traffic on the way to a child choking... But this occurs on a regular basis. It has to stop – before there is an accident!

The Professional Paramedic Association of Winnipeg has been in contact with other Emergency Medical Services across Canada and into the United States. We believe that the current practice by a vast majority of employers “*take your break when there is a lull wherever you are*” – (such as driving to the next emergency) is contributing to the deterioration of care delivered to patients and to the deterioration of the health and well-being of paramedics.



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We ask that this review committee consider this basic need that is not being met in the emergency medical services industry. Enforcement of such a change to the law should come with effective deterrents to employers who do not comply. *“Another call is waiting – maybe later”... is not the solution.*

The Review Committee’s consideration of this matter is greatly appreciated.

Submission by:

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Executive Member

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