



Did you know that workplace health and safety concerns can be grieved?

You probably know that the law in Nova Scotia requires your employer to provide you with a safe and healthy workplace. But did you know that the Collective Agreement requires this as well? Each Collective Agreement incorporates the duty of the employer under the Nova Scotia Occupational Health and Safety Act to “take every precaution that is reasonable in the circumstances to ... ensure the health and safety of persons at or near the workplace...” The obligation of school boards to ensure safe learning environments under the Education Act is also part of the Collective Agreement. This means that the failure of your employer to provide you with a safe and healthy workplace may be the subject of a grievance under your Collective Agreement.

The NSTU wants to encourage its members to seek the assistance of NSTU staff when they have health and safety concerns, whether they be about air quality, workplace hazards, or violence in the workplace. Yes, there are Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committees in each workplace, but the NSTU believes that its members need and deserve assistance in ensuring that health and safety concerns are properly heard and dealt with.

The NSTU plans to take the following concrete steps in the immediate future to ensure that school boards are living up to their legal obligation to provide teachers with a safe and healthy workplace:

- Regular articles in *The Teacher* on workplace health and safety matters.

- Starting in the 2014-2015 school year, the NSTU will be encouraging NSTU reps to sit on the Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committees. We believe that NSTU reps will have a strong voice on Occupational Health and Safety issues can help ensure a safe workplace.

- In cases where the rep does not wish to sit on the committee we are asking NSTU reps to discuss the importance of Occupational Health and Safety with their school staff and selecting an NSTU member to sit on the committee.

- Ensuring that the boards comply with their statutory obligation to conduct workplace violence assessments every five years, and, if required, to develop workplace violence prevention plans.

- Encouraging teachers to seek assistance from the NSTU when they have health and safety concerns.

- Collecting the contact information from all NSTU members sitting on JOHS Committees so that we can communicate directly to them when needed.

- Watch for the next issue of the *The Teacher* for information about how to deal with workplace violence.

Remember: when you need support to deal with threats to your health and safety at work, the NSTU is ready to assist.