

CONFEDERAL OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

REPORT 2017–2020

Occupational health and safety (OHS) is at the heart of our work at the CSN, our affiliated organizations, and in our unions. And OHS issues are not going anywhere, making them all the more important. According to statistics from the Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité du travail (CNEST), over the 2014–2018 period,¹ work-related deaths increased by 38%, employment injuries increased by 11.4%, and occupational disease increased by 104.3%.



NOTE REGARDING COVID-19

The confederal committee reports were produced in March 2020 for the convention that was to be held in May 2020. These reports include committee actions that were planned for the period between March and May 2020. Please note that said reports have not been modified and that the period from May 2020 to January 2021 will be covered in the next committee reports, which will be presented at the 67th CSN Convention.

Reports from the Auditor General of Québec have led to important work to change certain health and safety standards. The Auditor made recommendations to improve CNESST operations and, more generally, the compensation and rehabilitation system (2016),² as well as the prevention system (2019).³

This context of legislative and regulatory changes was the backdrop for this Confederal Occupational Health and Safety Committee's three-year mandate. The most important of these changes has been, without a doubt, the introduction of a bill to amend Québec's Occupational Health and Safety Plan.

Throughout our mandate, we have seen the consequences of budget cuts in the public sector coupled with structural reforms in the healthcare sector by Québec's former Liberal government. Although the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) did not continue these cuts to healthcare sector resources, the impacts on workers' health continue to be felt and are well known: overwork, psychological distress, psychological health issues, and so on. This put enormous strain on unions and managers, who are struggling to rebuild effective occupational health and safety prevention systems.

With this in mind, the importance of this Committee's work was clear. It was time to reflect and take action, both locally and at the confederal level. Locally, we put the emphasis on strengthening our unions so they could be more involved on the ground in improving the working conditions of our members. At the confederal level, we focused on issues related to the reform of occupational health and safety legislation. We also made it a priority to prepare a much needed mobilization of our members, with one goal in mind: making the government understand that occupational health and safety reforms should not be made at the expense of workers and their rights. These reforms should instead serve to eliminate the root causes of workplace hazards and allow unions to continue making improvements to workplaces. These changes should also guarantee better access to justice and the protection of labour rights, as well as fair compensation for accidents and occupational disease.

Events

APRIL 28: International Day Commemorating Death and Injury of Workers in the Workplace

On this day of commemoration, we take it upon ourselves as CSN activists to not only remember, but also take the time to think of the families and communities affected by these tragedies, acknowledge their suffering, and promise ourselves we will do our very best to prevent these tragedies in the future.

On this day, we also emphasize the importance of union action in preventing accidents and occupational disease by presenting annual statistics on work-related deaths and serious injuries. As part of this commemoration, we call on CSN employees and activists to wear black ribbons and observe a minute of silence in memory of those who have lost their lives at work. During this moment of remembrance, we also light a candle; the wick symbolizes the fragility of time and the flame reminds us of the suffering of these victims and their loved ones.

The poster for April 28 changes every year, and over the last three years we have had three different posters featuring three unique candle images.

National Occupational Health and Safety Week

In keeping with the 65th CSN Convention, the past three years' themes were on prevention-related union action: "Clear Vision: Focus on Prevention," "Clear Vision: Action Aimed at Prevention," and "Clear Vision: Successful Prevention." Our goal was to promote prevention while raising awareness and getting our activists involved in taking charge of health and safety in their workplaces. The CSN National Occupational Health and Safety Week, which has become a tradition, is a rallying event focusing on current topics in occupational health and safety (OHS), during which we present a variety of tools, video testimonials from our activists, and CSN health and safety services. It's an opportunity to spark discussion and organize activities in our unions to promote the Committee's actions. Over the 2017–2019 period, unions held nearly 65 activities,

which were attended by either the members responsible for OHS on central councils or other representatives. Moreover, thanks to social media, National OHS week allowed the CSN to reach a wider audience. This event helps make our workplaces safer so that accidents and occupational disease, whether physical or psychological, may be prevented.

The Bilan et perspectives (Review and outlook) conference

The CSN's Bilan et perspectives conference is an essential event on OHS. It's one of the two conferences, along with the Gérard Picard conference, during which the CSN gets a chance to meet with its unions to discuss important issues. Over 350 activists working on OHS, elected representatives, and advisors met in November 2019 to take part in a conference on the theme of "occupational health in times of technological change." The conference revealed that all sectors are affected by technological changes, which may be implemented unilaterally by the employer without providing any advance training or consideration for real work. Inspiring union accounts revealed that our unions are far from enduring these changes in silence. They are committed to documenting issues and making the voices of workers and even service recipients heard. We heard striking examples from some unions on how they were able to turn the tide and protect the health and safety of their members. In short, it was a lively conference with plenty of active participation and inspiring conversations.

Coordination nationale SST meetings

These OHS national coordination meetings are a time for sharing and reflection between our elected representatives responsible for this issue in federations, central councils, and the Confederal Occupational Health and Safety Committee. Between 2017 and 2020, we held three meetings. In March 2019, we discussed managing OHS in our workplaces, and presentations were focused on promoting strong union life by taking action on occupational health and safety issues. This meeting allowed attendees to put their OHS concerns and accomplishments in common. It inspired some very interesting discussions on avenues to develop that could help provide more effective and stable support for the OHS work unions and advisors are doing, particularly when it comes to training. At the November 2019 meeting, the Coordination nationale

SST focused on following up on the Minister of Labour's announcement about introducing legislation that would amend Québec's current OHS plan. Given the importance of this issue, our goal was to provide our elected representatives with a global view of this OHS plan by presenting its strengths and weaknesses and comparing it to plans from other countries. We also presented the inter-union stances on psychological health that had been submitted to the Minister of Labour. Our February 2020 meeting will serve to continue the work from our November 2019 meeting. The focus will be on furthering discussions on issues related to legislative changes and to agree on a common vision of these important issues to share with all bodies in the CSN.

The Un milieu sécuritaire pour tout le monde (safe workplaces for all) conference

In January 2019, the CSN invited university researchers to present their findings on OHS and intercultural relations at a conference in Montréal organized by the Confederal Occupational Health and Safety Committee and the Confederal Intercultural Relations Committee.

The conference had an attendance sixty people, and speakers discussed sources of vulnerability for immigrant workers, language proficiency as a risk factor and as a factor in accessing compensation, and the legal framework for subcontracting and temporary agencies. Those responsible for OHS from three different unions gave very inspiring accounts of integrating immigrant workers, which gave attendees a chance to share experiences and discuss possible solutions.

Themes addressed by the Confederal Occupational Health and Safety Committee

The members of the Confederal Occupational Health and Safety Committee were appointed during the December 2017 Confederal Council meeting. The Confederal Occupational Health and Safety Committee began work in February 2018 by adopting a work plan that addressed Convention resolutions, questions specific to the shifting landscape of occupational health and safety issues, and concerns on how to support our unions in improving prevention efforts. Committee members also worked on redefining their roles in order to revitalize and better coordinate the Committee's work with that of affiliated organizations.

Over the course of the mandate, two members were elected as presidents of their respective federations and had to be replaced. Between February 2018 and January 2019, the Committee held six meetings, with a seventh meeting in April.

FOCUSES:

Monitoring proposed changes to the legislative framework (AROHS and ARIAOD)

At all of our meetings, the Confederal Occupational Health and Safety Committee followed up on the status of discussions taking place through the Comité consultatif du travail et de la main-d'œuvre (advisory committee on labour and employment).

Inter-union positions on amending the *Act respecting occupational health and safety* (AROHS) and the *Act respecting industrial accidents and occupational diseases* (ARIAOD) were presented to the members of our Committee in February 2018. They were then presented to the presidents lastly, in June 2019, to members of the Confederal Council. Key elements of the supplementary guidance report on psychological health were also presented to the Confederal Occupational Health and Safety Committee in April 2019 and to the Coordination nationale SST in November 2019.

Monitoring the CNEEST's work on standards for noise and exposure values for chemicals and dusts

In 2015, the Auditor General of Québec examined CNEEST operations in relation to compensation. The resulting report concluded, among other things, that the CNEEST was not fully fulfilling its role as an agent of change when it comes to updating the occupational health and safety plan to match the context of the modern labour market. The Auditor's report, using the example of stagnating work on noise and contaminants, recommended that the work of CNEEST technical committees be more actively monitored. Two positive outcomes of these remarks were the CNEEST's establishment of a committee dedicated exclusively to reviewing noise regulations, and the reinstatement of the Advisory committee to modify the exposure values for chemicals (see Schedule I of the *Regulation respecting occupational health and safety* [RROHS]).

The CSN is a member of six CNESST advisory committees and one subcommittee, which we presented to the members of the Confederal OHS Committee and are as follows:

Comité de coordination (coordinating committee)

**Comité sur la sécurité des machines
(committee on machinery safeguards)**

Comité partenariat (partnerships committee)

Comité sur la réparation (compensation committee)

**Comité règlement sur la santé et sécurité du travail
(Regulation respecting occupational health and
safety committee)**

**Comité sur l'Annexe I du RSST
(RROHS Schedule I committee)**

Sous-comité sur le bruit (noise subcommittee)

We have made sure to follow up on the work of these committees and subcommittee at each Confederal Occupational Health and Safety Committee meeting.

Throughout this mandate, a number of regulatory amendments have been approved. Of these changes, the biggest step forward has been, without a doubt, the approval of new exposure limits for 180 chemicals (RROHS Schedule I). Other amendments have also been adopted, including on the prevention of falls (guardrails, harnesses, and safe areas), ladders and stepladders.

The amendments on noise regulation are at the pre-publication stage, which means we must re-discuss and ensure our response is taken into account before final publication.

Psychological health

Our Committee is dealing with many changes in the world of work, the organizational constraints these changes bring, and an increase in psychological health issues in workplaces. For these reasons, we have been following up on the psychological health action plan adopted by the Confederal Council in June 2014, which had the following four objectives:

**Focusing on raising awareness, training,
and union action on the effects of work organization
on psychological health.**

**Emphasizing prevention practices for psychological
harassment and violence in the workplace.**

**Taking actions that will help maintain and develop
support networks that have the potential to support
union action related to psychological health.**

**Ensuring that issues specific to certain groups
are taken into account.**

At the beginning of our mandate, a number of documents were already available to our unions and union advisers. There was still some work to be done, however, including:

**Developing arguments to convince employers
of the importance of prevention.**

**Finding ways to include factors conducive to
psychological health in our collective agreements.**

**Finding ways to facilitate the handling of complaints
related to work overload through negotiation.**

**Working on the prevention of psychological
harassment and violence at work.**

Promoting support networks in the workplace.

We have since seen all of this work completed. The prevention kit *For a Healthy Work Environment Free From Violence and Harassment* was launched at a Confederal Council meeting in March 2019 and distributed to all unions. The goal of the kit is to raise awareness and provide tools to handle these kinds of situations. It includes two documents: a violence and harassment policy model, including a template version so that unions can make changes and adapt it to their realities, and a guide that provides information on different parts of the policy. The guide focuses in large part on the necessary means to prevent violence and harassment and support victims, as well as union investigation into complaints and disciplinary measures. The kit also includes various appendices to assist unions in their work. Two videos on this issue have also been produced, one for federation bodies and another for sharing on social media.

All of this material has been consistently disseminated, including during the Coordination nationale SST meeting in November 2019. All of these tools are available on the CSN's SST training portal (<https://formationsst.csn.info/>).

With this action plan and these documents, the CSN renewed and strengthened its commitment to supporting and equipping its unions for challenges related to the prevention of psychological health issues at work. This work has also provided a full range of tools to encourage unions to address psychological health at work. Over the next mandate, we plan to take a number of actions to raise awareness about, promote and disseminate these new tools.

Post-traumatic stress has also been a major focus of ours during this mandate, and we have been raising awareness on this issue with both our members and the government.

Supporting unions addressing occupational health and safety

When unions address health and safety in their workplaces, prevention is often organized more systematically, and addressing OHS leads to actions that improve worker health and safety. This is only possible, however, if union leaders get involved and have the right conditions, organization, and abilities needed to work effectively.

The project we did with the Fédération du commerce encouraging unions to address OHS showed us there is a pressing need for training and coaching to improve these skills in unions so they can take charge of OHS.

The content and format of the prevention-related union action training session *Action syndicale en **prevention*** are being reviewed. A new training session that supplements and builds on this prevention-related union action training session and includes coaching is at the pilot project stage with the Fédération de l'industrie manufacturière (FIM).

Chemical exposure prevention in the workplace

Despite scientific and technological advances, a significant number of workers are still exposed to chemicals that cause adverse health effects. There are many, sometimes very serious, consequences. Whether it's for the victims of exposure to carcinogens, those experiencing the effects of solvents or welding fumes, or the many who live with debilitating dermatitis and other skin conditions, we need to face prevention work in this area head on.

Throughout this mandate, the Confederal Occupational Health and Safety Committee has been studying the procedure for substituting solvents in the workplace. Michel Gérin, a retired professor, and Université de Montréal researcher Denis Bégin looked at the importance of substituting solvents in workplaces and created the *Solub* website, in the hopes of facilitating the substitution of these products with others that are less harmful.

We also made one of the themes of the CSN's 2018 National Occupational Health and Safety Week "the importance of preventing exposure to hazardous products," as well as focusing on the importance of unions being vigilant when it comes to updating and using the regulation material safety data sheets (WHMIS).

Taking action on job quality: health and safety issues for agency workers

Changes in the world of work have led to the transformation of employment relationships and the fragmentation of workplaces. More workplaces are making use of temporary agencies. Workers from these agencies—mainly immigrants, young people, and women—are facing ever-increasing job insecurity, which puts their health and safety at risk and makes it difficult for them to exercise their rights.

Resolution 3.1 of the *Agir sur la qualité du travail* ("taking action on job quality") conference states that the CSN and its federations will monitor the work being done across Québec on the changing nature of work organization and management approaches and the resulting effects on working conditions. To this end, the CSN is a member of the *Table de concertation sur la SST des immigrants* (issues table on the OHS of immigrants) and of the Director of Public Health for Montréal committees focusing on implementing initiatives to improve the lives of temporary agency workers. The Committee has been kept informed of their work. The CSN also contributed to disseminating the Director of Public Health for Montréal report *Invisible Workers: Health Risks for Temporary Agency Workers*.

Conclusion

At the time of writing, we are waiting for bills to be tabled that will reform Québec's OHS plan. This will be a very important change that will shape union action for the coming years, and we intend to put forward the CSN's demands. To this end, the CNESST has developed guidelines and a road map, which were adopted by the Confederal Council in March 2020.

Our right to work in safe environments was won through hard-fought battles. We intend to defend this right, fight to improve it, and adapt to the new realities of working life.

This Committee will continue to supply the movement with information on health and safety issues. Committee members will be more present on CSN bodies and at CSN events and will convey the Committee's reflections to all members of our unions.

The Committee will prepare a work plan when the next mandate begins. Various issues presented in this report will continue to be the focus of the Committee, but we will also work on new issues. Disseminating information to our unions will remain a priority, since the occupational health and safety work accomplished by the CSN is significant, and it's essential that we keep our unions informed.

1
La CNESST en bref: Année 2018. (2019). Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité du travail. <https://www.cnesst.gouv.qc.ca/Publications/200/Documents/DC200-1047-13web.pdf>.

2
Report of the Auditor General of Québec to the National Assembly for 2015–2016. (Spring 2015). "Chapter 4: Employment Injuries: Compensation and Rehabilitation of Workers."

3
Report of the Auditor General of Québec to the National Assembly for 2019–2020: Report of the Sustainable Development Commissioner. (May 2019). "Prevention in Occupational Health and Safety." Performance Audit. CNESST.

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