

# Taking Collective Action

## A CWA Strong guide for local leaders to quickly address safety violations and concerns in the workplace

We CWA members take pride in our work in normal times. In this moment of crisis, we take great pride in providing essential services to our communities, in Health Care, Telecom, Journalism/Media, and the Public Sector, among others. It is the government's and employer's responsibility to provide a safe workplace including proper training, personal protective equipment, and record-keeping of possible exposures and infection. As union members, we have the opportunity and responsibility to ensure that our workplaces are safe and to hold management accountable when they are not adequately addressing the compelling health and safety needs of this current crisis. This also allows us as union workers to lead by example in setting health and safety standards in all workplaces. We can play a powerful role in addressing safety violations quickly in order to prevent exposure to COVID-19 in our workplace and the spread of the virus to our families and in our community. Here are some steps you can take to deal with safety concerns.

### 1. If you think your working conditions put you at risk, CWA has put together a pool of information for union members.

We should recognize that the current CDC and OSHA guidelines are not strong enough to fully protect workers, and we have to do better. As union members we have the opportunity to organize and mobilize around workplace health and safety issues and at the same time raise the standards for all workers.

#### **Before taking any action, read up on your rights:**

"Employees may be faced with new risks in the workplace as a result of the COVID-19 epidemic. Employees who refuse to perform work due to concerns over COVID-19 exposure may risk discipline for "insubordination."

However, such discipline can potentially violate the law and/or a collective bargaining agreement ("CBA"). If you have concerns about the risks you face in the workplace, you should consult with your steward or a Local officer for advice. Below are some considerations for employees to keep in mind.

Continue reading at [www.cwa.org/covid-19](http://www.cwa.org/covid-19)



## 2. Talk with your coworkers and get their feedback about the safety concerns they have. Agitate them to take action.

Since we are in a time of social distancing, phone calls and video calls are recommended. If you are having a group meeting, set up a conference call or a zoom video call with everyone.

### ***Ask open ended questions such as:***

- How do you feel about not having enough PPE provided for all of us?"
- "What are some concerns you have about potentially being exposed?"
- "How does it make you feel when our manager tells us to reuse gloves, masks and ration hand sanitizer?"
- "What safety concerns have you heard from other folks?"
- "Would you take action with us to address these concerns?"
- "Do you know when someone in your workplace is sick with COVID-19 and whether management has done what they should to disinfect the workplace?"

Listen to their response and transition the conversation to the vision of collective action. An example of such a vision :

*"The company has sent emails stating that they will comply with CDC and OSHA guidelines, but in our work area or department, the majority of us feel like we are being put at risk. We need to act quickly and together so we can do something to address this. Will you join us?" (If there are any concrete examples of change in the workplace via collective action you can add "CWA Members at X work site took Y action and got Z result. We know we can do something similar here. Will you join us?")*



### **3. Call your steward or local officer and get guidance on next steps.**

If there is a contract violation, a grievance should be filed. Consider a group grievance - grievances around safety typically make good mobilization opportunities because they affect many people and concerns are widely shared. If it's not a contract violation, the company is still obligated to ensure a safe workplace and you should still mobilize with your co-workers.

### **4. Make a plan for strategic and escalating action.**

Be creative about the collective action and get input from your local officers, stewards and coworkers. We can't expect that management will do the right thing as soon as we ask them to and it is important that we make a plan for escalating action. We have to start small and then turn up the pressure if they refuse to meet our demands. When planning your action, be mindful of the current guidelines of 6 ft social distancing (or more if possible), less than 10 people in one meeting room or space or better yet, finding a way to meet virtually, working from home, and amplify these guidelines to highlight the importance of the need for safety in the workplace.

***Whatever action you and your co-workers take, make sure to collaborate with your local officers and stewards, wear your red swag, review the plan the day before, and get commitments for participation from everyone involved.***

*As you plan your escalating actions, work together with your internal organizing and LPAT coordinator to incorporate community allies, local elected officials and press!*



## 5. Get creative and have fun with your action plan. Here are some possible actions:

- a.** Video conference call with your manager, where everyone makes a collective demand, wears red, buttons, or changes their background to #UnionStrong #CWAStrong #PPENow
- b.** Create a petition with demands and one by one have members deliver it to their manager while keeping their 6ft distance (or more) while wearing red swag.
- c.** Make a paper airplane with your petition or demands and throw into managements office.
- d.** Come into work with homemade PPE . Ex: gloves, face masks, etc.
- e.** Place signs in your personal car windows or plan to drive to your workplace collectively while honking in support of demands.
- f.** Call in action to your direct manager
- g.** Virtual rally or car rally

## 6. Take your collective action, have fun, and build solidarity!



# A reminder to always implement and use our mobilization structure!

The current health crisis we are facing reminds us that our mobilization structure is more important than ever. We should not wait until contract time to utilize it, we should be putting it to work at all times. Especially during a time of crisis where there is so much urgency, stewards and members need to be prepared with accurate information and pass it on to their work-group quickly. We might not be able to have the face to face conversations, but we can get creative through other means of technology like conference calls, local town hall calls, video conference calls, group chats, etc. Organizing and mobilizing to address health and safety issues in the workplace, sets us up for success in current and future contract bargaining by helping identify leaders, stewards or activists and strengthening our mobilization structure.

- Build your mobilization structure based on the makeup of your unit and the needs of the workplace.
- Educate members through your local mobilization structure, through emails, texts, phone calls, video conference calls.
- Using the local mobilization structure puts us at an advantage to address workplace safety concerns quicker if we need to take a larger collective action.



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