



Memorandum

The Alberta Teachers' Association

INFORMATION MEMO

Date 2025 03 11

To Members of the Fort McMurray Public and Catholic Teachers' Bargaining Units

From Sean D Brown, Coordinator, Teacher Employment Services

Re **UPDATE:** Canadian Union of Public Employee (CUPE) Labour Action in Fort McMurray Public and Catholic Schools

The Alberta Teachers' Association (Association) is committed to updating members on CUPE Locals' 2559 and 2545 (CUPE) labour action plan and providing advice and guidance to teachers.

As the CUPE strike continues to affect our schools, the Association has received increasing reports from members regarding concerns about the cleanliness of schools. In some cases, there are troubling reports of biohazards not being addressed in a timely manner.

While the Association understands that the Division has instituted some contingency to mitigate the impact of the CUPE strike, we must acknowledge that these measures are not sufficient to avoid disruption entirely. We recognize the tremendous impact this situation is having on our members, and we stand firmly behind you as you navigate these challenges. As much as we support our CUPE coworkers, the ongoing inability of the Division and the CUPE Locals to reach a fair settlement is continuing to compromise your work environment, and this cannot be allowed to persist unchecked.

The guidance we have provided in previous communications remains unchanged, but we want to emphasize that the Association is here to support you as you address situations where working conditions have reached a level of concern or potential risk to health.

It is essential to recognize that, while teachers and principals will take appropriate action to address clear and immediate safety concerns, routine custodial tasks are not part of your responsibilities. Therefore, we advise our members not to take on this work.

While the end of this memo includes templates for protest letters, it is important to first ensure that you have followed available divisional procedures and had initial conversations with the appropriate parties.

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To assist you in addressing these concerns effectively, we encourage you to consider the following steps:

1. Have you clearly communicated your specific concerns to your school's leadership team? What was their response?
2. Have you raised the situation with your school's Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) committee or your representative on the divisional OHS committee? What was the outcome?
3. Have you documented the issues thoroughly, including taking photographs where appropriate?
4. Have you considered filing an OHS complaint? If so, ensure you've documented the steps you've taken to address the issue locally before escalating further.

The Association will continue to advocate for you and your rights, and we are committed to ensuring that your health, safety, and working conditions are not compromised. We will not accept a situation where members are left to work in unsafe or unhealthy conditions. Please do not hesitate to reach out to TES (1-800-232-7208) or CUPE Concerns Hotline 1-888-796-1368 for further guidance or support.

The Association is fully committed to ensuring that your voices are heard and are requesting members contact TES if they are being inappropriately directed to complete tasks that may be a risk to your health and wellness.

You can also provide a letter to your principal outlining your concerns. Below, you will find a template(s) for your use:

Hi *(addressed to your school principal)*,

I have been asked to *(describe the CUPE-related task the teacher has been asked to perform)*.

With respect, I do not believe it is reasonable for the Division to ask me to perform this task because I do not normally do this kind of work as a teacher, nor would I be expected to since it would be handled by other personnel in the Division.

[OPTION 1, (two paragraphs)] I am not comfortable performing this task since I do not feel I have the proper skills or training to mitigate risk or fulfill my role of *in loco parentis* for the student(s). Potential hazards include injury to a student, damage to division equipment, respiratory hazards, and biohazard contamination that I am not properly trained to identify and control.

As a result, I do not believe it is appropriate for me to perform this task, and I request that the Division make arrangements to have this work done by a qualified professional.

OR

[OPTION 2 (two paragraphs), IF THE TEACHER PERFORMING THE TASK CONSTITUTES AN IMMINENT DANGER TO THEM AND/OR OTHERS IN SCHOOL, under Alberta's Occupational Health and Safety Act they should refuse to carry out work and state the following]

I am not comfortable performing this task since I do not feel I have the proper skills or training to mitigate risk or fulfill my role of *in loco parentis* for the student(s). Potential hazards include injury to a student, damage to division equipment, respiratory hazards, and biohazard contamination that I am not properly trained to identify and control.

As a result, I believe it is my duty under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* to refuse to carry out this task because it presents an **imminent danger** to my health or the safety **of other staff and students in the school**. I request that the Division arrange to have this work done by a qualified professional.

Thank you.

Your Name
Title and School

Should you choose the template above relating to “imminent danger,” you are strongly advised to contact TES **before** you send in that version of the letter. Imminent danger is a high bar and could require other steps, like calling 911, reporting the danger, contacting parents, and possibly sending students home. Essentially, if you are reporting an imminent danger, you need to be prepared to act accordingly.

Due to the complex nature of schools, providing blanket advice can be challenging. Each situation requires careful consideration of its unique context to offer the most appropriate guidance. Therefore, we strongly encourage teachers to reach out to the Association directly for personalized support.

It is undeniable that both teachers and school leaders are facing heightened pressures as a result of the ongoing strike. This is the very nature of strikes—they create strain on systems and are designed to highlight the critical value of the work that has been withdrawn.

Simply put, the more work that is done outside the striking group, the longer it may take for the disputing parties to reach a resolution.

While we understand the desire to keep things running smoothly, it is important to recognize that doing work that should be handled by others only prolongs the dispute.

The current situation is particularly challenging for school leaders. Principals are now tasked with balancing the needs of their schools while providing thoughtful support to their staff. By adhering to the Division's direction, principals can ensure that messaging and directives are aligned and consistent.

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Labour action is never simple, and its effects are far-reaching. However, it requires sustained and concerted effort to make a meaningful impact. In light of this, the information provided by the Association to our members may evolve as the CUPE situation develops.

We are committed to keeping you informed and will do everything we can to ensure you are up to date with the latest guidance.

We continue to work closely with CUPE officials and your Local President, Mr Jay Duffett, to make sure that teachers fully understand what is happening and how they can best manage the new pressures that this labour action has created.

During any potential CUPE action, members with questions or concerns about their roles and responsibilities as teachers should contact TES at 1-800-232-7208 or CUPE Concerns Hotline 1-888-796-1368.

SDB/dmc/ejl

cc J R Duffett, Local President, Fort McMurray Local No 48

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