



# OREGON STATE FIRE FIGHTERS COUNCIL

International Association of Fire Fighters  
AFL-CIO CLC

MLAC  
Co Chairs  
Committee Members

July 2, 2020

Co-Chairs Winther and Wood, Committee Members and Administrator Van Winkle,

For the record, my name is Karl Koenig, President of the Oregon State Fire Fighters Council representing over 3500 career suppression, prevention and aircraft crash fire fighters, Emergency medical Technicians and Paramedics.

COVID 19, the Corona Virus, the Pandemic and all the various names assigned to this situation brings us together for you parse out if a presumption is appropriate for essential workers in Oregon.

This issue crosses different workplaces, industries, but also includes societal and economic impacts that must be considered moving forward. Workers Compensation is the method for receiving guaranteed resolve when injuries or occupational disease occur in the workplace.

The COVID 19 exposures of early on, probably as late as December 2019, are the same exposures and symptomatic workers we see now. The majority being Health Care workers, including nurses, home health care workers, extended care and residential care facilities workers. Those keeping the hospitals, nursing facilities, schools and buildings open where necessary are also being exposed and becoming symptomatic. Our first Oregon COVID 19 patient was a school employee. Our Grocery Workers remain some of the most exposed due to their frequent and seemingly unavoidable encounters with the public.

The data, while interesting does not tell the complete story regarding workplace exposures. For example; agricultural workers and those without the knowledge, access or under duress or coerced not to file, how do we capture those cases? Those economically fragile that reporting a workplace concern much less an occupational exposure as a result of their employment must be considered. In the fire service we initially experienced relatively high exposures rates in the early days of the pandemic only to have proper PPE and training available in a very quick manner. It is worth noting that claims for time loss without a positive test, mostly because testing was for the most part was non-existent, were covered by the employer and no WC claim were filed.

But this is another case of false hope, when manufacturers and suppliers gouge our employers for PPE regardless of the Governors orders to the contrary. The next challenge that further exacerbates the need for a presumption is the lessening of the standard of respiratory protection as the result of supply chain availability. Lightening the standard to include multiple patient or days on end wearing of the same masks is reason alone to enact the presumption.

Reporting and procedural inconsistencies, regulatory disagreement, supply chain challenges, social and economic pressures leave those who kept the stores opened, fire engines and ambulances staffed, prisons staffed, hospitals clean and operating, processing and keeping us fed, caring for our elderly and infirmed without pause have earned this presumption.

As Oregon charts a path to normalcy, it must find the path that crates a reliable, consistent safe path for Oregon's essential workers to remain on the job site, safely manufacture our food, pharmacy, respond to emergencies, and if for some reason the certified PPE, safety engineering and practical distancing doesn't do its job then the system must do it's. Right now, that does not consistently exist across Oregon and we can do better.

The Oregon State Fire Fighters are here to serve and appreciate the opportunity to comment on this important issue.

Regards,

*Karl Koenig*

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