



TRIPARTITE BEST PRACTICES

FULL TIME WORKER CO-CHAIR



The Ontario Construction Secretariat Tripartite and Board of Directors have endorsed the role of a Full Time Worker Co-chair as a “best practice” for improving safety on the jobsite as well as enhancing labour relations and productivity. The FT Worker Co-chair is a prime example of Ontario’s Internal Responsibility System working well by supporting improved communication and attention to detail. This initiative has earned the respect and confidence of the Ministry of Labour (MOL) as sites with a FT Worker Co-chair have consistently implemented policies and procedures that exceed the requirements of the Ontario Health & Safety Act (OSHA), resulting in fewer injuries, work orders and visits from MOL inspectors.

REQUIREMENTS UNDER OHSA

OHSA requires that a Joint Health & Safety Committee (JHSC) be formed when the workforce on any individual site reaches 20 workers. The JHSC must be co-chaired by a representative each from the Constructor (which may be the Owner, Project Manager or Prime Contractor) and Labour.

The Constructor’s representative is appointed and the Labour representative is selected by the workers onsite or appointed by the unions representing those workers and may be employed by the Prime Contractor or any of the sub-contractors on site. The Labour Co-chair’s employer must permit the time necessary to fulfill his/her role as a Safety Co-chair without any loss of wages.

EVOLUTION OF THE CONCEPT

The genesis of the Full Time Worker Co-chair occurred during the complex re-development of Lester B. Pearson Airport. This project spanned several years, countless contractors and sub-contractors and peaked at over 2000 workers. For the duration of the project, there was a consistent Management Co-chair, however the Labour Co-chair was regularly changing as the job progressed and contractors and their workers demobilized with the completion of their portion of the job. This resulted in a high degree of lost continuity relative to site knowledge and ongoing safety issues as concerns were not being addressed in a timely manner. The number of incidents on site increased and several Ministry of Labour (MOL) orders were issued, including one site-wide Stop Work Order.



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Given the safety concerns on the job and the need to create continuity, consistency and stability, the Central Ontario Building Trades (COBT) approached PCL/Aecon (the joint venture constructor) in 2002 with the idea of taking on a Full Time Worker Co-chair to be selected by the COBT on behalf of the workers. The COBT reasoned that this position would bring confidence to the workers by installing one point of contact that would act as the voice of the workers and address any issues in a timely manner. PCL/Aecon agreed that a Full Time Worker Co-chair had merit and implemented the position. Within a short period of time, the Full Time Worker Co-chair was able to attend all meetings, perform all site inspections and address workers' outstanding issues which resulted in a significant decline in safety incidents and improved the general morale of the total workforce.

The Full Time Worker Co-chair is a Best Practice that ensures the requirements stipulated in the Ontario Health & Safety Act are realized effectively and efficiently by creating continuity, consistency and stability on the jobsite. Ultimately, this Best Practice aids in creating safer and more productive construction jobsites.

Since the early implementation of this concept at Pearson Airport, the Full Time Worker Co-chair has been used on the following projects:

Goreway Co-Generation Plant

Initially, the Full Time Worker Co-chair position was not deemed necessary by management, however, when safety issues and jurisdictional disputes started affecting cost and schedule and the site was shut down by a MOL Stop Work Order, the program was implemented with success. Once installed on the site, the Full Time Worker Co-chair ensured the site was back on track by fostering communication between management, workers, unions and business agents. The program worked so well that the Full Time Worker Co-chair remained on site for the duration of this three year project. When a second shift was added, an additional FT Worker Co-chair was hired for the night shift.

Portland's Energy Centre

After their successful implementation of the Full Time Worker Co-chair at Goreway, the prime contractor chose to implement the program at the start of their Portland's Energy project.

Halton Hills Co-Generation Plant

After witnessing the benefits of the Full Time Worker Co-chair first-hand on the Goreway site, the prime contractor (Aker Solutions) agreed to employ a Full Time Worker Co-chair on a trial basis for a 3 month period. The Co-chair developed an excellent relationship with all parties involved, improving the confidence of management and labour and promoting a harmonious jobsite. As a result, management kept a Full Time Worker Co-chair on site for the duration of this two year project.

Horgan Water Treatment Plant

The prime contractor (Alberici Constructors) learned of the Full Time Worker Co-chair through involvement in the OCS Tripartite Conference and through its success on other jobsites. The program was part of the project plan at the bid stage and was successful in maintaining a very safe and positive site environment over the entire duration of the two year construction schedule.

On each job where a Full Time Worker Co-chair has been implemented, the feedback has been extremely positive. Once the prime contractor has an opportunity to see the program in action, they appreciate and recognize the value it brings to their site. Prime contractors who have been involved with the Full Time Worker Co-chair program have stated that they would adopt this program again on a similar site. All are fully supportive of this initiative.



IMPLEMENTING THE FULL TIME WORKER CO-CHAIR BEST PRACTICE

Getting Started

Either the constructor or the local Building and Construction Trades Council can initiate discussions regarding the assignment of a Full Time Worker Co-chair once a project has been awarded.

Project Parameters

Not all projects require the implementation of a Full Time Worker Co-chair. Workforce levels, trade diversity, length of project and scope complexity need to be taken into account.

Usually one Full Time Worker Co-chair is sufficient; however work schedule (large number of workers on a second shift) and geography may necessitate a second position.

If a project is expected to meet one or more of the following milestones, the implementation of a Full Time Worker Co-chair should be considered:

- A minimum of **100 workers** employed on site for a period of several months with total work exceeding **200,000 hours**.
- **Four or more different trades** on site at any one time.
- **Three or more sub contractors** on site at any one time.

Cost

The Ontario Health & Safety Act requires that the employer permit a worker the time necessary to fulfill his/her role as a Safety Co-chair. This includes attending JHSC and Worker Trade Committee meetings, preparing reports, conducting OHSA site inspections, investigating safety complaints or accidents, liaison with management and MOL inspections. **This legislated responsibility is a real project cost regardless of how the role is assigned (i.e. contractor employs a FT Worker Co-chair or utilizes a worker from the jobsite).**

In the scenario where the constructor utilizes a designated worker from the jobsite, the employee receives regular wages, yet is often pulled away from his/her crew responsibilities to attend to safety matters (whether planned or unplanned). The crew must therefore work shorthanded, potentially impacting safety and productivity. Alternatively, the employer must add to the crew size which may result in unanticipated labour costs.

The FT Worker Co-chair provides consistency, continuity and stability resulting in fewer safety incidents, less jobsite disruption and higher worker morale. Contractors report that the implementation of a FT Worker Co-chair leads to improved performance and enhanced productivity.

Consider the scenario of a project employing 200 workers for a period of 12 months. The cost of a Full Time Co-chair for 12 months is estimated at: \$60/hour x 2000 hours = \$120,000. Given the productivity gains achieved with the FT Worker Co-chair, we can assume a minimum productivity gain of ONE HOUR PER WORKER PER MONTH. This translates into a savings of 2400 worker hours over the course of the 12 month project, more than off-setting the cost of the FT Worker Co-chair.

Selecting and Training a FT Worker Co-chair

Candidates are appointed by the Building Trades to ensure support and credibility from all trades on site. Candidates do not have to be selected from the incumbent workforce and in some cases it may be preferable to have the position filled by an individual who does not have project “baggage”.

The Full Time Worker Co-chair must rise above trade favouritism or bias and, at all times, retain a clear understanding and acceptance that the prime focus is a safe and more harmonious project for all stakeholders. The Co-chair must be willing to represent either labour or management interests at various times in order to achieve this objective.



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Key characteristics that equip the Co-Chair to function effectively include:

- Journeyperson in good standing with 10-15 years work experience
- OSHA certified
- Relationship and team building skills
- Analytical skills
- Good written and oral communication skills
- Basic computer skills

Ensuring a Successful Project

The success of the program is fully dependent on the 100% buy-in and open-minded approach of both management and the Building Trades. Management must be willing to provide the Co-chair with the latitude required to make recommendations and take the necessary action. They must also be willing to embrace the untraditional approach of taking recommendations from a worker. The Building Trades must provide consistent support to all stakeholders, assisting the Co-chair in performing the required duties and in facilitating meetings between management, sub-contractors and local unions. All parties must remain objective in working toward the common goal of improving site safety conditions and maintaining a harmonious jobsite.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

1) Enhanced Project Safety

The FT Worker Co-chair proactively monitors safety on the jobsite. Workers report greater confidence in safety as the FT Worker Co-chair pro-actively monitors safety conditions, identifies potential hazard and clearly communicates with both workers and management. Workers are able to focus on the job at hand knowing someone is actively addressing safety concerns. Contractors have observed that this Best Practice results in a greater focus on safety, timely hazard identification and a reduction in injuries, particularly Lost-Time Injuries.

2) Consistency, Continuity and Stability

The FT Worker Co-chair brings consistency, continuity and stability to a job site resulting in fewer safety incidents, less jobsite disruption and higher worker morale. Contractors report the FT Worker Co-chair leads to improved performance and enhanced productivity. With full knowledge of the project, the Co-chair is able to facilitate discussions, propose solutions and identify any potential trends or issues.

3) Enhanced Project Communication

As the eyes and ears on the jobsite, the Co-chair ensures that communications lines are created and remain open. This fosters early identification of issues and allows the use of informal mediation to resolve issues before it is necessary to seek formal resolution processes. Overall, this creates efficiencies onsite and provides potential project savings.

4) Labour Relations

Although safety is the primary focus of the FT Worker Co-chair, his/her knowledge of the project provides labour and management with an impartial perspective of potential labour relations concerns. Contractors report that the early identification of issues results in the avoidance of costly and time-consuming grievances. Workers cite that the FT Worker Co-chair promotes greater harmony among the various trades knowing the Co-chair has the support of all the building trades and their Business Agents.



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