

## The Goal is in Sight

Fighting for better health and safety provisions  
in both RSMC and UPO bargaining

A historic round of Rural and Suburban Mail Carriers (RSMC) negotiations is about to begin. This is CUPW's first time going into RSMC negotiations with the right to strike. While much progress has been made since January 1, 2004 when this current agreement took effect, CUPW's eventual goal is equality with the urban operations (UPO) bargaining unit.

All three of the themes of this round of bargaining—fairness, respect, and progress—apply to our health and safety (H&S).

Every day, many RSMC brothers and sisters work side by side with UPO members, and are exposed to the same risks. Yet RSMCs do not have the same health and safety protections as the UPO bargaining unit. It is time we had equality and respect in the workplace.

### Workload and Overwork

Overburdening, stress, and long hours are factors in many accidents and repetitive stress injuries (RSIs). A member can only manage the workload if she/he gets credit for all the work that she/he performs, and if the union can verify that the workload is properly and fairly distributed.

Changes in the volume of mail, and restructuring of routes are altering the workday for RSMC members. The current RSMC collective agreement does not enable the union to protect RSMCs from unreasonable workloads.

**The current RSMC collective agreement had an eight-year term and expires December 31, 2011**

*Demand #22: Whenever possible, routes shall be established at 8 hours per day, 5 days per week. This shall include paid rest periods and meal periods.*

RSMC workers have a right to eat and rest and to be paid for the time.



**The union needs the right tools to protect you from unreasonable workloads.**

*Demands #17, #18 and #19:* These demands call for a route measurement system (RMS) based on the letter carrier system. It would establish time values for each and every task, require that RMS data be made available to the Union, and provide for paid union observers during any volume count, restructure or adjustment to an RMSC route.

When RSMC routes are subject to a proper measurement system, it will assist the union in ensuring that workload is reasonable and that our members are paid for all the work they do. It will also help us protect members from bad route restructuring.



## Provisions from Urban Collective Agreement

Demand number one in the RSMC package of demands is to bring several provisions from the UPO collective agreement (CA) into the RSMC agreement. It is only sensible: RSMC members generally do the same work as many urban members. They sort, prepare, pack and load the mail for delivery, in the morning, and then go out and deliver the mail under all weather conditions. RSMCs face the same issues when delivering the mail: dogs, angry customers, traffic, and so on. They should have the same working conditions as the urban members and the same rights when it comes to health and safety.

**Many of the other RSMC demands are things we are fighting to get in the UPO contract as well. We're all in this fight together to secure better conditions for everyone.**

## Benefit plans

Currently, RSMCs are entitled to the hearing and vision plan, the dental plan, and the drug plan. Urban members have these plus the extended health care plan. For UPO workers, Canada Post also has to pay 50% of premiums for disability insurance, and 70% of the provincial medical insurance premium that is required in British Columbia.

One of the provisions we are asking for under demand #1 is the UPO collective agreement's Article 30 – benefit plans (extended health care, dental, hearing and vision, disability insurance, provincial medical insurance).



## Rest periods and leave

RSMC members deserve rest periods and leave provisions that help manage stress and get adequate rest for the body.

The current RSMC agreement provides for up to 4 weeks of paid vacation leave per calendar year, and no paid pre-retirement leave. Having the same provisions as the UPO contract would give RSMCs better tools to enrich their lives and protect their health and safety.

The current RSMC contract provides for unpaid leave. It is high time that RSMCs get paid sick leave that is not controlled by an insurance company. Workers who don't have paid sick leave are under greater pressure to work while sick. This may aggravate the illness or injury, and spread contagious illnesses to co-workers and customers.

There are several needless differences between the RSMC and urban contract provisions on various leaves such as bereavement, marriage and leave for other reasons.

For injury-on-duty, RSMCs currently get only the provincial workers' compensation board payments. Equivalency with the UPO contract would entitle members to paid leave for the full wage component approved by the workers' compensation board.

## Exposure to the Elements

RSMC members work in some unusual conditions without protection. Some rural and suburban routes are more exposed and have fewer opportunities to warm up. Even inside it's not comparable or predictable. Some RSMCs do their sorting work in a basement or garage, in some cases without stable heating in the winter.

*Demand #14: Employees shall be provided with full uniform entitlement comparable to a PO MSC-1 of the urban operations agreement.*

*Demand #12: Minimum heat and cold protections shall be established for the inside duties.*



*As well, demand #1 includes UPO Article 34.05 –boot and glove allowance (with additional increase of \$20, from \$240 to \$260).*

The current RSMC agreement provides for a boot and glove allowance of up to \$240. This is just not enough -- decent boots and gloves don't cost less in rural areas. The RSMCs have to deal with cold, rain, snow, ice and wet pavements just like urban members and need the same allowance.

When the collective agreement provides minimum standards for indoor temperature protection, RSMCs will be better equipped to protect their health against harsh weather. Proper uniform allowance would help ensure that boots and gloves are ready to deal with cold, wind, and slippery conditions for fewer accidents.



## Road Safety

RSMCs face road dangers just like other motorized postal workers, but are responsible for providing, insuring, fuelling and maintaining their own vehicle. Most private vehicles are left-hand drive, which means that driving down roads and delivering to mailboxes that are clear across the vehicle involves extra risks no matter how the worker resolves it.

*Demand #16: All employees shall be provided with a right hand drive vehicle. Employees with RMBs on their routes shall be provided with vehicles within 12 months of the date of signing. All other employees shall be provided with a vehicle within the next 6 months. The employer shall pay the cost of maintenance, insurance, liability insurance and fuel. The employer shall continue to pay the vehicle allowance based on the CRA amounts and*

*business/commercial insurance until employees are provided a corporate vehicle.*

With right-hand drive vehicles, RSMCs would not have to climb across the vehicle to reach out of the passenger side to deliver to the mailbox. Let's remember, RSMCs face this situation hundreds of times each day.

As well, Canada Post would be responsible for maintaining the vehicle in safe roadworthy condition.

## Health and Safety Basic Protections

The Canada Labour Code provides the rights and protections for all workers in federal jurisdiction. RSMCs are currently covered only by these standards.

These protections apply for UPO members too, but CUPW has also been able to improve some health and safety provisions through bargaining. We have

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negotiated rights for union H&S representation; first aid training; restrictions on lifting; emergency transportation; pay for time and expenses for employer-required medical examinations; measurement of the quality of the environment and noise levels, protections for dog problems and for dangerous goods, and provisions for stools and fatigue mats. We will negotiate such provisions for RSMCs too.

Another of the UPO CA provisions under demand #1 is *Article 54 – work reintegration program (duty to accommodate)*: This article requires the Corporation, the Union, and the worker who is disabled to work together on accommodations.

Postal workers have been subject to unequal treatment for decades, and there's just no justification for it. As long as there is a group of workers with inferior health & safety protections, there will be



See *Perspective* Volume 39,  
number 2 for the full list of  
RSMC demands, available at  
[www.cupw.ca](http://www.cupw.ca)

downward pressure on everybody's health and safety rights and benefits. We need benefits that are fair and equal. It will give members better protection, and it will make the union stronger in our unity.

## Harassment and Human Rights

Human Rights protections are fundamental to our well-being. The effects of workplace harassment can include long-term health problems. When our human rights are protected at work, we enjoy better health and safety overall.

*Demand #32: Include Human Rights protections in accordance with the principles found in the Canadian Human Rights Act. Add a definition of the grounds of harassment and an effective and timely investigation process involving union representatives in all phases. Provide human rights training for all employees.*

## Our Goal for RSMC Health & Safety

We are on two parallel roads to better health and safety for RSMCs.

When current RSMC and UPO members are in the same bargaining unit, our solidarity will result in greater bargaining power, and unified strength for all ways of dealing with the employer.

In the meantime, fighting for better conditions for each unit is good for us all. Each negotiating team can fight for provisions that help all workers. The more we are united, the more able we'll be to look after ourselves and our families -- to avoid injuries, and also to be equipped to face the health problems that can happen to anyone. Our solidarity is the health of the union, and the health and safety of all members is among our primary values.

## Additional demands concerning our health and safety in the workplace:

Demand #11: No payment from a Workers' Compensation Board can be recovered unless fraud is proven.

Demand #13: Pregnant employees shall be entitled to precautionary cessation of work.

Demand #15: The employer shall implement an employer-paid peer training program for all new employees. We have peer training for urban members and we've had very good results.



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## Our Health, Our Safety

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