

IBEW LOCAL 77 MEMO

DATE: July 29, 2020

TO: Members

FROM: IBEW Local 77 Administration

RE: Face Mask Controversy

This communication is to inform the membership of the status of a topic regarding wearing face coverings while engaged in work that requires two or more employees to perform. As we all know, on June 8, 2020, as part of the Washington Safe Start Order put out by the Governor's Office, it required that all employers require employees, in all phases, wear face coverings while at work. A few weeks later, a similar requirement also was released by the Governor's Office that all citizens wear a face covering while in public places. This was in addition to the June 8th Order.

IBEW Local 77 understands the pandemic we are facing. Safety in the workplace is one of our cornerstones in which we were founded. Our Local Union is not making the request that our Members deny or refuse to follow the Order. We heard from you, the Members about the challenges you face while engaged in critical work. Work that requires you to have control of an energy source. That source may be electrically energized, pressurized fuel, or mechanical forces. Where safety, awareness, and training are of the utmost importance without interference. Where the training you have received tells you to remove all hazards that may put your personal and crew safety at a compromise. The importance of the 5 senses is crucial when engaged with an energy source. The sense of sight, hearing, smell, speaking are essential. If an introduction of a new requirement or component interferes with your ability to see through your vision protection, effectively communicate, hear the communication of your peers, etc. is impacted, that hazard must be removed. The face coverings fog up glasses, effect depth perception, muffle the voice, eliminate facial expressions or non-verbal cues.

In our industry, we have had established for many decades an advisory Committee to Labor and Industries and the Governor's Office called EUSAC (Electrical Utility Safety Advisory Committee). EUSAC is comprised of voting members who represent IBEW Local Unions 77, 483, and 125. The Committee also has representation from our employers. Some of the employers are, to name a few, Puget Sound Energy, Tacoma Power, Pacific Corp, Seattle City Light, Snohomish PUD, the Central PUD's, Avista Utilities, Inland Power, National Electrical Contractors Assoc. (NECA), etc. Labor and the Employers are united on this front. It's unanimous. We made the request that the State recognize the hazard, and allow workers in the Utility industry that are engaged in work that requires them to have control of an energy source, the ability to work free from this hazard. We recognize that not all work is in this scope all of the time, that we would only request that there be a variance in such circumstances.

The State was willing to listen and asked that we further engage in talks. We were optimistic, still not quite certain, but proceeded in the talks to finally hear that on July 17, 2020, that the State would not move from their position that all industries must follow the Order. The State made reference to studies and data that affirmed that masks were safe, nonetheless, Labor and the Employers requested that L&I provide to the EUSAC Committee the data for our review.

Furthermore, the Committee also asked if the State was going to hold their position, would the State assume the responsibility and liability of their decision to uphold the Governor's Order and not recognize the hazard of the worker. The State withheld their comment to this.

Like noted before, the IBEW Locals and the Employers are not foregoing the importance and safety of the current pandemic. We are fighting for reasonable safety standards in this pandemic. Safety standards that mitigate all hazards. That the hazards we face in our workplaces come in many forms, mitigating those hazards should not create new hazards that diminish the hazards already known. Although this process has taken longer than expected, we are continuing the work in this. It is important that our Membership maintain their safety and health and that our voice will always be heard.

MB/jn
opeiu8 afl-cio