

Volunteering to Learn

Eastern Ontario Health & Safety School challenges participants to prepare for prevention

Participants attending a health, safety and compensation educational organized by the labour councils of Eastern Ontario feel it is better to both give and receive.

What each of the 60 participants gave was their time, experiences and ideas. What they received was greater awareness, more confidence and a renewed resolve to return to their workplaces seeking safer and healthier work environments. The vehicles for this exchange were labour education programs from the Workers Health & Safety Centre (WHSC) or those of the Ontario Federation of Labour's Occupational Disability Response Team (ODRT). WHSC programs offered this past spring included Level I, Level II Law and a number of ergonomic-related programs.

Participants in each of the sessions offered a range of reasons why they were investing their own time to participate though each related to a desire to get involved. Some explained they were new to workplace joint health and safety committees (JHSC). Others wanted to be prepared to step up their involvement as current JHSC members or activists in their workplace(s) will retire soon. Some simply wanted to become better informed so they can work more proactively in their workplaces.

"Though I shared my two cents, I also took in what others said, related it directly back to conditions in my work and considered how my working conditions and that of my co-workers could be improved," explained Mike Lee, member of Teamsters Local 419.

Peter Boyle has been hearing these types of comments since first organizing the twice yearly Eastern Ontario Labour Councils' Health, Safety and Workers' Compensation


Educational 19 years ago. There are many reasons why this initiative has proven to be successful. First and foremost though, says Boyle (a retired member of United Steelworkers Union Local 343 and long time health and safety activist), is the fact participants are here because they want to be here. "Each of these activists is giving up their evenings and weekend because they want this training and they want it through traditional labour education."

The format of this educational involves participants arriving on Wednesday evening with sessions beginning immediately and running through Sunday. Participants stay on-site at the Isaiah Tubbs Resort and Conference Centre in Picton, Ontario.

"Spending time over the four days with other participants both in class and in the social setting helped create a more comfortable environment for sharing information, ideas, questions and concerns," explains Julia Lynch, a member of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 109.

Lynch, a case manager with Community and Family Services for the City of Kingston, also points to the use of WHSC-

qualified instructors as a key element of this training.

It is also important to note, says Boyle, these instructors volunteered their time too. "This is one of the many factors helping us to keep this training accessible in terms of scheduling and costs. It seems to be working as this spring's educational was the largest ever." 

Peter Boyle encourages training participants to enjoy this opportunity and to share their concerns, ideas and experiences.



The fall 2009 Eastern Ontario Labour Council Educational is scheduled for Wednesday November 18, 2009 to Sunday, November 22.

For information about courses being offered or any other questions please contact:

Peter Boyle (613)539-3622 or peter@rbsinternet.com

Diane Besner—WHSC rep, (Ottawa area) (613)232-7866 or 1-888-869-7950 or diane@whsc.on.ca

Randy Fisher (Cornwall area) (613)933-7527 or uswa_9343@yahoo.com