Published on *University of Toronto Faculty Association* (https://www.utfa.org)

Asbestos Contamination in the Medical Sciences Building

March 24, 2017

UPDATE: UTFA has sent a letter to the U of T Vice-President & Provost Prof. Cheryl Regehr, requesting a task force be created to address asbestos handling at the U of T.

Please be aware that CUPE 3902 is advising its members to avoid going into the Medical Sciences Building (MSB) on the St. George Campus, for any reason, until further notice. The way in which recent asbestos contamination has been managed has raised serious issues. UTFA members close to the events believe that neither the testing methodology used by the University administration nor the distribution protocol for (disputed) air testing complies with asbestos regulation requirements. UTFA remains extremely concerned that the asbestos contamination may have adversely affected our members as well as students and others at the MSB, and that their health and safety continue to be at risk. In light of all of these issues, UTFA feels compelled to urge its members and the wider community to think seriously about whether they should be entering the Medical Sciences Building at this time and under these circumstances. UTFA reminds its members that, as workers under the Occupational Health and Safety Act, they have the right to refuse unsafe work. UTFA will advise and support any members who wish to exercise this right.

Please also see the March 24 message to UTFA Council from the Vice-President, Grievances:

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing to give you a brief update on UTFA's work through the Grievance Portfolio to address the issue of asbestos contamination at the Medical Sciences Building (MSB). UTFA is also working on a message that will go out to all members shortly.

As I reported to UTFA Council on Tuesday, a recent series of incidents of asbestos exposure and ongoing asbestos management in the MSB have raised serious concerns, including: a lack of transparency; the absence of an effective internal responsibility system required by the *Occupational Health and Safety*

Act; the absence of timely information-sharing about the cause of these exposures and the full extent of the exposures; and the absence of a comprehensive action plan to prevent such exposures from occurring in the future. Our members are also concerned that both the testing methodology being used by the University administration and the distribution protocol for (disputed) air testing results do not comply with asbestos regulation requirements. In short, UTFA remains extremely concerned that these incidents have adversely affected our members as well as students and others at the MSB, and that their health and safety continues to be at risk.

Over the past two weeks UTFA lawyers and I have been meeting and conferring extensively with UTFA members who work in the MSB, legal experts from Goldblatt Partners, U of T union representatives, the Ministry of Labour, members of the U of T administration, and others, to address these serious concerns. To this end, please see below Goldblatt Partners lawyer Mandy Wojcik's legal opinion on **The rights, duties, and liability of faculty members under the *OHSA*** that we distributed to our members who work in the MSB (Additional information, including UTFA's letter to the Ministry of Labour, is available below).

In the coming days and weeks we will continue to work very hard to seek to protect the health and well-being of our members and the broader community.

As always, faculty and librarian members who have specific questions or concerns should bring them to UTFA's attention at faculty@utfa.org.

— Terezia J. Zoric
Vice-President, Grievances

News Coverage

- University of Toronto's faculty, staff demand asbestos audit (Globe and Mail, March 31, 2017)
- Asbestos found in U of T labs stokes concern from faculty, students (Globe and Mail, March 24, 2017)
- Asbestos leak during renovations forces closure of two University of Toronto labs (CBC, March 24, 2017)

File attachments:
Letter from UTFA to the Ontario Ministry of Labour (March 21, 2017)

Source URL (modified on Aug 26 2021):https://www.utfa.org/content/asbestos-contamination-medical-sciences-building