

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 281-19(2): Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission Capacity

June 2, 2020

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My question is for the Minister responsible for Worker's Safety and Compensation Commission. I'll ask these questions: as the reliance of WSCC risk assessment for reopening businesses and workplaces is key to the success implementation of the Emerging Wisely plan and economic recovery of the NWT, can the Minister tell us what the current staff levels are within WSCC to review risk assessments and inspections? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Minister responsible for the Worker's Safety and Compensation Commission.

HON. KATRINA NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The WSCC has 16 people in the Northwest Territories who are working on responding to COVID-19, either through direct contact with stakeholders or in the research and development of resources. This does not include our communications group. To ensure that stakeholders have timely information and assistance, our group in Nunavut has three people who are also being utilized as backup whenever needed to answer any enquiries. Additional help is being pulled, or can be pulled, from other areas in the organization, but where people have occupational health and safety knowledge to assist. WSCC does not review risk assessments. However, if the employer needs help to complete or has questions, they can contact our OHNS inspectors and they provide guidance. Inspectors will request a copy of the completed risk assessment if they are responding to concerns, and, as per the CPHO orders, completed risk assessments must be made available at the worksite and they must be updated if situations or conditions at the worksite change.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Minister for that. It sounds like there is a lot if inspection work that is going to be required. It is clear that with the Emerging Wisely plan that there will be an increased workload for WSCC in terms of general enquiries, maybe not reviews of risk assessments but assistance in workplace inspections. Can the Minister explain whether WSCC has conducted any analysis of how the current workload is expected to increase under the Emerging Wisely plan?

HON. KATRINA NOKLEBY: The WSCC has completed a relaunch inspection plan, which I can make available to the Member. All enquiries that WSCC has been responding to with respect to COVID and their regular business have been answered within the standard service timeframe. At this point, WSCC has not come to me and said that they have any staffing issues. However, it is a situation that I'm alive to. If we do determine that they are being overwhelmed with COVID response or back-to-work plans and advice, we would then look to get them the supports that they need.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Minister for that. I would very much be interested in seeing the inspection plan. I'm not sure it's what I asked for, which is an analysis of the increased workload, but I'll move on. Can the Minister tell me what new resources, including staff, contractors, and/or funding, have been allocated to this increased WSCC workload to help implement Emerging Wisely?

HON. KATRINA NOKLEBY: As mentioned, WSCC has not needed to add new resources. However, all resources within the prevention division are being utilized for site inspections, telephone engagements, et cetera. We have also partnered with the Northern Safety Association, which is also providing education and advice to its member employers. As mentioned, if the WSCC does feel that they need to have more resources allocated, we would look at that time. WSCC is always in a guidance-providing position with all employers, so, despite COVID being busier and slightly needing some reallocation of resources, this is the business that WSCC does always and continues to do so. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Final supplementary, Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Minister for that. I guess I'm still not quite convinced, here. It would also be helpful to know whether service standards have been established for responses to enquiries under the Emerging Wisely Plan for a risk assessment assistance, site inspections, and any other anticipated work. If there are significant delays from the service standards, that should logically trigger the need for additional resources and those triggers should be identified ahead of time. Can the Minister tell us whether service standards have been developed for the WSCC's role in implementing Emerging Wisely, how those would be used, and whether those service standards are available publicly?

HON. KATRINA NOKLEBY: WSCC has not developed new service standards as our standards are always to have safe workplaces. COVID is just a new additional risk that is factored into the health and safety planning. It does not create an entirely new type of health and safety or risk assessment. Therefore, the service standards that we are adhering to always can be found on our website under the "About WSCC" tab. I won't read you the link here. Please note that we do commit to responding to voicemail and email messages within 24 hours. We are monitoring our ability to respond on a daily basis and to date have continued to meet the standard. I have encouraged them to be proactive, and we do have discussions, and they know my door is open if they feel that they are not able to meet this. Seeing as we've had no delays, I think we're good. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.