

PROGRESSIVE CERTIFIED TRADES COALITION



Representing Plumbers,
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Public and worker safety at risk with new government amendments

Electrical deaths expected to rise with latest move by Ontario Liberals

TORONTO, ON (Nov. 28, 2016) - Seventy per cent of electrical-related deaths that occur on job sites are due to improper installation procedures yet the Kathleen Wynne Liberal government is quietly moving ahead with legislative amendments that will increase the likelihood of more worker deaths and put the public at risk – all for the benefit of special interest groups that profit from using cheap and unskilled labour.

“More people will die as a result of these amendments that allow unskilled workers on job sites to do the work of compulsory trades. For decades it has been the law that the work of a trade designated as compulsory can only be done by a certified journeyman who has gone through extensive training and practical on-the-job experience or by a registered apprentice,” says Jim Hogarth, President of the Progressive Certified Trades Coalition (PCTC).

According to the Electrical Safety Authority, 49 Ontario workers were killed by electrocution between 2004 and 2013 and 71 per cent of those deaths were in non-electrical trades. In 2013 alone there were 18 electricity deaths. On average, 1,685 Ontarians visited an emergency room due to electrical injury each year between 2003 and 2012.

SCHEDULE 17 – introduced and hidden within Bill 70, an omnibus bill introduced by Ontario Finance Minister Charles Sousa on Nov. 16 – will, if passed, allow the Ontario Labour Relations Board (OLRB) to overturn enforcement actions by the Ontario College of Trades (the College) the governing body for skilled trades in Ontario.

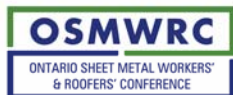
“The key role of the OLRB is to settle labour relations disputes between employers, employers’ organization and trade unions. Its mandate is not to protect the public nor to ensure a skilled labour force for the future yet it will now have the ability to overturn decisions by the College which was given that authority and has the expertise. This has effectively neutered the role of the official governing body,” says James Barry, Executive Chairman, Membership Development for the IBEW Construction Council of Ontario.

“This decision appears to be based on influence rather than sound policy or public protection principles. What message does this send to the thousands of

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electricians across the province who have invested in skills training so they can provide quality work and maintain the highest safety standards,” asks John Grimshaw, Executive Secretary Treasurer of the IBEW Construction Council of Ontario.

“Not only does this put the lives of the public and workers at risk but taxpayers will also be footing the bill when mistakes by untrained individuals need to be corrected. As employers of electricians, we have been committed to hiring the best trained professionals in the country but clearly the government doesn’t see that as future for a prosperous Ontario,” says Jeff Koller, Executive Director of the Electrical Contractors Association of Ontario.

There are currently 22 compulsory trades in Ontario in which a person must hold a valid Certificate Qualification, or be registered as an apprentice in a given trade and a member of the Ontario College of Trades (OCOT) to work or be employed in that trade. Certification is compulsory to ensure that anyone engaged in the practice of trades which pose risks to workers, public safety or consumer protection, are properly trained and sufficiently competent to perform work properly and safely. The Certificate of Qualification (CofQ) is the only demonstrable proof of that training.

Now those trades which include everyone from plumbers who ensure safe drinking water and sprinkler fitters who are responsible for fire safety will have their important designation effectively negated by the powers of the OLRB whose decisions are final. This will impact public protection on a far-reaching and damaging scale.

“This bill proposes a peculiar and erratic public policy: that a regulator that functions under one set of legislative objectives in the public interest be appealable to an adjudicator that operates under an inconsistent set of legislative objectives,” says Raj Anand, one of the country’s leading legal experts.

“What prompted this extreme action? Where are all the enforcement actions in the province of Ontario that were unreasonable? One must ask who profits from these amendments,” adds Hogarth.

While the government has included a clause that says the OLRB shall consider if an individual’s actions pose a risk of harm, it is suspect that they are transferring the assessment of risk of harm from the people who know best – skilled trades professionals – to a quasi-judicial body that has never had any mandate or experience in assessing risk of harm.

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“We don’t understand how the government can say on one hand that they want to build a skilled workforce and then turn around and say you don’t need to be trained to do complex and potentially dangerous work,” adds Koller.

The PCTC is calling on the government to sever Schedule 17 from Bill 70 and refer it to a legislative committee where all interested parties, including the public at large, can fully discuss and understand the impact and make recommendations. The public needs to ask who is benefiting from these extreme changes in government policy and who will be hurt as a result?

For more information contact:

Jim Hogarth, President of the Progressive Certified Trades Coalition

CELL: 647-390-6782

EMAIL: hogarth@optc.org