

Presentation by Cindy Romphf - District Occupational Health and Safety Committee

At the SD61 Operational Policy and Planning Committee Board Meeting

Monday, November 21, 2022

~Reinstatement of Custodial Cuts~

Good evening.

My name is Cindy Romphf and I am the 2nd Vice President and Health and Safety Officer of the GVTA. I am also the Co-Chair of the District Occupational Health and Safety committee for SD 61.

The District Occupational Health and Safety Committee represents the GVTA, CUPE 382, CUPE 947, and PVPA of the Greater Victoria School District. We have come together to take a strong stance regarding Health and Safety concerns throughout our district in regards to budget cuts to custodial staff. Funding and work hours need to be reinstated to our Daytime Custodial staff as soon as possible.

A letter was sent to you regarding our concerns and it has the signatures of representatives of each union and association to show how strongly we feel about this. This letter carries the weight of the concerns of **every employee** of our school district. EVERY. SINGLE. STAFF MEMBER..

We have very strong concerns that SD 61 is not following the **Provincial Communicable Disease Guidelines for K-12 School Settings** or our own **School District Communicable Disease Prevention Plan – School Sites**.

Page 7 from the “**Provincial Communicable Disease Guidelines for K-12 School Settings**”

Frequently Touched Surfaces:

- Cleaning and disinfection of frequently touched surfaces should occur at least once in a 24-hour period **and when visibly dirty.**
- Frequently touched surfaces are items touched by a larger number of students and staff. It goes on to list those items

Page 5 from SD 61’s “**School District Communicable Disease Prevention Plan – School Sites**”

General cleaning and disinfecting of the premises and cleaning/disinfecting of frequently touched surfaces at least **once every 24 hours.**

- Frequently touched surfaces include door knobs, light switches, hand railings, water fountains, toilet handles, tables, **desks and chairs used by multiple students.**

- This is not being done every 24 hours. It's not even being done once a week. These are being cleaned every Pro-D. That's once a month. This is not the fault of our custodians. Their workload is way too much and this has been compounded from past years of custodial cuts. There is only so much one can do in the hours they have been assigned.
- Now let's go on to desks and chairs used by multiple students. At the middle school level, particularly in grade 8, students are transitioning to different classrooms to prepare them for secondary school and the multiple transitions that happen there. One desk in one day will be used by multiple students. At the Elementary level, it's unreasonable to think that a student stays at their desk for the entire day. These students, particularly in the primary grades, can't sit still for 15 mins, let alone for the whole day. All the students are touching multiple surfaces throughout the classroom. And do you think their hands actually stay clean after they wash/disinfect them? I have a kid in kindergarten. We are still trying to teach him to not put his hands on his face, in his mouth, and in his nose.
- Clean and disinfect **any surface** that is **visibly dirty**.
 - *Those of you who have children. Think back to when they were 5 or 6 years old. Now think of how they ate at the table and what that table looked like afterwards. Were those tables just as clean as before they started? Absolutely not. Maybe it's just my kids, But I have to sweep under the table and wipe the table afterwards because at this age, kids haven't developed the fine motor skills to control how clean they are when they eat. Now think of a class of 26 kindergarten students eating lunch at their desks....Because of the custodial cuts these desk surfaces are cleaned maybe once a week. These kids and teachers are doing their best, however these surfaces need to be disinfected more frequently than once a week.*
 - *There are also major concerns regarding students with bad allergies. The lack of frequent disinfection of desk surfaces poses a serious health issue for these students.*
 - **You know what would help improve this? More hours for custodians. Restoring funding to custodians.**

Cleaning and disinfection of frequently touched surfaces and **any surface** that is **visibly dirty** are NOT being cleaned once every 24 hours as both the Provincial and District guidelines and plans state. **Again, this can be improved with reinstated custodial hours.**

In many schools, the cleaning/disinfecting of these surfaces and items were shared with the night custodians. Because of the cuts to daytime custodians, many responsibilities that used to be done by the daytime custodians have now been added to the list of responsibilities of night time custodians - and this is on top of the responsibilities that they already currently have. **The hours of the night custodian have not increased, but their list of responsibilities have significantly expanded.**

We know that this district has been doing their best to adjust to these funding cuts. However, these conditions are not sustainable. Many of our work spaces have turned into health and safety issues not just for our staff, but for students as well. [Worksafe claims are on the rise and worksafe fines are also adding up.](#)

[Because of the custodial cuts, other people are doing the job of CUPE 382 members such as administrators and students. This is making custodians feel unappreciated and is bringing down morale.](#)

Toxic body fluids such as puke and urine are left alone if there is no custodian present at the time.

[There is one instance where there was vomit in the hallway. The white powder was sprinkled on top of it. Then someone decided it was a good choice to block off a portion of the hallway with tables and chairs. That entire situation has multiple huge health and safety issues. This needs to be cleaned up and not left for the entire day. The white powder becomes quite slippery. As per emergency evacuation procedures, hallways must be kept clear at all times. Bathrooms have been closed for the day in schools if they are in a bad state. Schools are required to have a certain number of bathrooms that people can access and when bathrooms are closing, this lack of access is not safe.](#)

The Custodians of SD61 have some of the longest runs in the province. That means they have the most square footage they are responsible for - and this was BEFORE the cuts. And now, they have more and more being added to their list of things to do in a day. ***This is not reasonable. This is not sustainable.***

- Because of low morale of other working groups in our districts, and now due to the custodial cuts, their workspaces have turned into health and safety issues, these cuts have turned one working group against another. Morale amongst custodial staff is really, really low. They feel very unappreciated, overworked and their work conditions are very poor.
- Why should our custodians stay working in our district? Under these conditions, they are not. Many are starting to look for other employment where they are appreciated and have a better work load. There could be a significant number of custodial staff leaving their positions. And we currently already have trouble finding workers to fill our spareboard positions. ***And we haven't even finished the first term of the school year.***
- I urge you trustees and senior admin to work together to find a solution to ***restore funding to our custodians immediately.***
- The staff of SD61 deserve to work in a clean environment, it is our right to work in a safe, clean environment and especially, our students deserve to learn in a clean and safe environment.

Thank you for your time.