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CUPE delegates to march for ambulance paramedics

VICTORIA – More than 500 CUPE BC delegates are expected to join striking ambulance paramedics and supporters Friday for a march past the B.C. Legislature. The delegates are in Victoria for the Canadian Union of Public Employees' BC Division convention.

The march will start at the Victoria Convention Centre at 12 Noon Friday, pass by the Legislature and move on to a rally at the Best Western Hotel on Quebec Street, where the BC Ambulance Service has been housed for **eight years** in a "temporary" station.

The station is an example of the critical condition of the ambulance service and illustrates why the 3,500 ambulance paramedics are on strike. There is at least one more temporary station in Victoria and another station housed in a building containing asbestos. Paramedics report decrepit conditions in stations across the province.

The CUPE 873 members have been on strike since April 1. They want the government to agree to an independent mediator and get back to the bargaining table. The last (LRB) mediator booked out of the dispute weeks ago.

The paramedics are fighting for adequate ambulance staffing levels to ensure better emergency response times, wage parity with other emergency response workers and a multi-year deal for stability and public confidence. The employer, the BC Ambulance Service, offered only a one-year deal with a three-per-cent wage hike. Minister of Health Services George Abbott finally met with the paramedics last week, but refused to discuss monetary issues.

Among the speakers at the rally will be Ambulance Paramedics of BC president John Strohmaier, CUPE BC president Barry O'Neill and CUPE National president Paul Moist.

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