

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Paramedics face firing for safety check

KELOWNA – Two Ambulance Paramedics put their jobs on the line by safety checking their vehicle. The two were suspended without pay today and told to expect a disciplinary hearing and possible firing after they insisted on completing the daily safety check of their ambulance. Striking ambulance paramedics are picketing regional offices in response.

In a separate incident, a crew member in Nanaimo was sent home for safety checking his ambulance and told to expect a disciplinary letter.

While WorkSafe BC regulations require the safety checking of ambulances “prior to start of use” (before they go out on a call), the employer claims that can be done after the first call or whenever there is a slow period. Paramedics say the problem is that the employer doesn’t want to pay the paramedics for checking the vehicles.

Ambulance Paramedics of BC president John Strohmaier called the employer’s actions “unconscionable.” He added that, “Our priority is always safety first - it’s not as if we needed any more indications of this employer’s attitude towards our members or the public.”

Strohmaier pointed out that on the same day the BC Ambulance Service is disciplining paramedics for safety checking their vehicles, “there was a serious incident in a school parking lot in Burnaby today - the brakes failed on an ambulance and the driver had to drive into a ditch to avoid anyone getting injured. ”

The ambulance paramedics say they will continue to safety check the vehicles before using them and point to several instances of catastrophic brake failure as examples of why the checks are so essential.

The 3,500 CUPE 873 members have been on strike since April 1 to reverse what they say is a serious deterioration of ambulance services in B.C. that has led to the current “critical condition.”

The paramedics say they will establish a picket line around spare ambulances if the employer tries to force vehicle transfers. Picket lines went up at regional offices in the province today until 4:30 pm and are planned to go up again before the start of the workday tomorrow and remain in place until further notice.

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Contact: BJ Chute, Director of Public Education, Ambulance Paramedics of BC: 604.218.6169
Murray Bush, CUPE National Communications Representative: 778.554.2234