

**Workers' Safety and Compensation  
Commission Service Innovations during COVID-19**

Mr. Speaker, today I wish to provide an update on some of the service improvements, including the financial relief measures the Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

When the pandemic hit, the Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission responded quickly to adapt its operations. In line with public health guidance, all employees in Yellowknife, Inuvik and Iqaluit were swiftly equipped with the right technology, moved to work from home, and safely transitioned back to offices once appropriate safety measures were put in place. Since March 2020, the Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission has successfully maintained services to 4,000 employers and almost 40,000 workers in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut without significant interruption. A commendable achievement.

Mr. Speaker, one of the ways the Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission continues to ensure business continuity and to enhance frontline services for employers and injured workers is by offering virtual and online alternatives. Prior to the pandemic, work was already well underway to expand online options, such as Mine Supervisor Certification and e-business services offered through WSCC Connect. However, it is undeniable that the practical challenges posed by COVID-19 has accelerated the adoption of some digital platforms and business transformation through sheer necessity.

The Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission has taken a highly flexible and adaptive approach. For example, claims services are working with service providers in healthcare to address some of the practical barriers to providing virtual-based care plan options for injured workers. In suitable cases, services offered have ranged from medical

appointment follow-ups, counselling, physiotherapy home exercise plans and assessments, and Vocational Rehabilitation assessments and follow-up.

These improvements are in the early days and, though modest, are meaningful and will ultimately offer a more supportive and responsive service for injured workers and their families, a quicker resolution for employers, and a reduction in claims costs.

Mr. Speaker, Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission educational outreach and inspections are important parts of ensuring the health and safety of workplaces across the Northwest Territories. In 2020, the Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission adapted these in-person activities and provided assistance to over 2,760 employers through alternative means such as phone and online. Educational tools and guidance were developed and rolled out for industry use and the webinars and Zoom meetings that replaced annual events with partner organizations and professional associations were well attended.

Inspections are an essential mechanism for accountability to ensure that employers are meeting their legal obligations under the *Safety Act* and *Occupational Health and Safety Regulations* and the *Mine Health and Safety Act*. Engagement and outreach gives employers access to guidance and best practice tools so they can create and maintain strong safety plans and also ensures the Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission remains responsive to the challenges they face.

Mr. Speaker, the Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission is also making continual improvements to the more established e-business services on WSCC Connect. A new service for employers to report workplace safety incidents or injuries was recently launched on the platform. Employer's Report of Incident joins existing services, such as payroll reporting, online payments, assessment rates information, clearance requests and report of unsafe work. For example, employers who reduced their workforce during the pandemic had the opportunity to submit a revised payroll estimate online and to make their payments without penalty at a later date.

At this challenging time for many businesses, the Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission announced last November that the average rate for employer assessments will be maintained at the 2020 rate levels. Employers have already received notification of their industry assessment rates. That the average rate is holding steady at \$2.40 per \$100 of assessable payroll is positive news at a time of economic uncertainty for so many.

The Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission remains committed to making Northern workplaces the safest in the country, to delivering care to injured workers, to working collaboratively with the Office of the Chief Public Health Officer to reduce the risk of exposure and transmission of COVID-19 in workplaces and to providing practical support to employers and local businesses to operate safely.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.