March 20, 2020

To all Local 6 members,

This past week has been a lot to take in for the membership. Even today we are still seeking clarification on the Shelter-in-Place Order, both for our Private and Public Sector bargaining units. As we get solid clarifications we have been passing them along via the website and intend to continue in this manner, at least while the restrictions on gatherings is in effect.

As I noted in my update this past Sunday, we are now in uncharted waters. Nobody is exactly sure what the effects of the Coronavirus outbreak will be in our area. That if the recent government reports are any indication, we can expect it to impact our day to day lives greatly. If not directly through a high infection rate, then by the curtailment of many activities we would take for granted.

Some five days later, we have gone through an unprecedented level of project closures. The Local Union and the SFECA worked on an MOU that would allow workers to stay on their dispatch to an employer for any projects that were shuttered, and to draw unemployment in the process. This last provision, the drawing of unemployment benefits without separation from the employer, is a violation of the Inside and Sound & Communications Agreements without the COVID-19 MOU.

The amount of hands that have been idled as a result is not exactly known at this time, but there has not been an onslaught of traffic into the Hall if that is any indication. We expect that some projects will be restarting once the Owner or General Contractor make the preparations necessary to provide a safer work environment. We cannot tell you with any certainty what jobs will restart, and those which will not. I wish I had the ability to do so, but I do not.

There has been upheaval in the Public Sector as well, with a limited number of workers sent home on administrative leave, but most of our classifications are deemed essential and are listed as Disaster Service Workers (DSWs). Some workers that were sent home are now being called back as the City has determined that certain essential operations could not happen without them.
What is really important for all of you to realize at this time, both in the Public and Private Sector, is that many of the tasks you are completing will lead you to feel like it is ‘business as usual.’ Nothing could be further from the truth.

Safety is important part of the IBEW and its purpose; we were founded by workers and one of their goals was to promote safe work practices. We are trained to take electrical safety very serious, and the same goes for typical jobsite safety issues like ladders, scaffolding, etc.

But we are in a distinctly different safety situation now, namely a virus we can’t see. But our training to use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and to assess our work environment for hazards can still serve us well. Gloves and Safety Glasses have become the norm for most, if not all, of our employers. You must continue to wear them. Though not fool proof, they provide some level of protection you need at a time like this.

If the tasks you are assigned seem unsafe, take a moment to see if you can make them safe or ask your supervisor to be reassigned to another task. Your employer does not want to see you get this virus!

As we move into the unknown, it should be expected that tensions will be heightened. We all need to remain calm and respect the fact that we, along with our co-workers, are in a stressful time. Breath. Count to ten. Don’t be a jerk. Go home safe and healthy.

We in Local 6 have a long history: 125 years to be exact. In those many years we have seen our way through two World Wars, a Great Depression, a Great Recession, industrialization and even de-industrialization. We have also survived a global pandemic -- the Spanish Flu of 1918.

We got through all of that by doing what we do best. By being Local 6. We stood together, shoulder to shoulder, through the toughest times. We’ll need to have a little more distance than shoulder to shoulder, but we will get through this together. Be respectful. Look out for yourself, your families, and your fellow members.

In Solidarity,

John J. Doherty
Business Manager – Financial Secretary