

DO YOU HAVE A WORKFORCE ADJUSTMENT COMMITTEE IN YOUR DEPARTMENT OR AGENCY?

Workforce Adjustment Committees should always be joint

The Workforce Adjustment Appendix specifies that departments and organizations must establish Workforce Adjustment Committees to manage workforce adjustment situations. The union believes that they should always be composed of union and management representatives or, in other words, joint.

Past practice and many collective agreements specify that they should be joint. Article 21 of Treasury Board collective agreements specifies that upon request of either party, the parties shall consult meaningfully at the appropriate level about contemplated changes in conditions of employment or working conditions. Joint Workforce Adjustment committees are consistent with this obligation and with the employer's obligation to consult as completely as possible, as soon as possible and throughout the whole process.

They are also consistent with the law. The Public Service Labour Relations Act says that consultation committees consisting of both the bargaining agent and the employer must be set up regarding issues relating to the workplace that affect employees. It's hard to conceive of an issue that affects employees more than potential job loss.

Standing Workforce Adjustment Committees

Some PSAC components have standing Workforce Adjustment committees that are dedicated to addressing adjustment and employee transition issues all the time. Since the WFA outlines a proactive process for dealing not just with job loss and relocation but with potential job loss and relocation, standing WFA committees are ideal.

Standing committees are instrumental in good human resource planning and to deal proactively around important issues like training needs, the obligation to eliminate contracted work in the workplace and other issues to minimize the impact of a WFA situation when it does occur.

Depending on the complexity of the WFA situation and the size and geographic span of the department or agency, there may also be a requirement for regional or local WFA committees.

Although term employees aren't covered by the WFAA, a standing Workforce Adjustment Committee is a good forum where management and the union can work to ensure that term employees are treated in a fair and transparent manner.

Although standing WFA committees are the ideal, to date only a few departments have agreed to this practice. Therefore it is extremely important for PSAC components to set up joint committees as soon as the possible threat of workforce adjustment is announced.

The 2011 federal budget announcement of cross-departmental cuts and the implementation of individual departmental cuts that began in previous budgets are ample evidence that employees are in potential WFA situations. Workforce Adjustment Committees should be formed immediately if they aren't already in place.

Some departments and agencies may resist their obligation to form committees, either because they believe it's not necessary until actual job loss is imminent or because they would rather act on their own without the union. The union believes that when this occurs the employer is not meeting its obligations and must be challenged.