

April, 2007

TRAINING UPDATE

Journey person Upgrading

Recently a group promoting “Skills for Energy Efficient Construction” (including the Clean Air Alliance) held a number of workshops involving contractors, construction associations, unions, and educators. At one of those workshops, the discussion got to how to provide the training for individuals in the building trades in the new techniques that would be required for constructing “green buildings,” using environmentally friendly construction methods. Would apprenticeship curriculums have to be revised? If so, who would pay for that?

Even more problematic was the issue of training existing workers. There has to be investment in their training. A recent example is high performance concrete. Some of the techniques for finishing this concrete (which employs slag and fly ash as components) are *contrary* to the methods cement masons have traditionally employed. How can we make sure journey person concrete finishers are properly trained in the new methods?

We frequently need workers to fill vacancies at job sites – vacancies which require training, for example forklift operators. There are experienced construction workers, sometimes on the out-of-work list, who could be trained to do these jobs – fairly quickly because of their existing skills and their experience. But it is very difficult for these workers to attend any training program longer than a day. The rules of Employment Insurance make it very difficult, if not impossible, for individuals to attend training. They risk being cut off from benefits.

The construction unions at these workshops were unanimous that workers should be allowed to attend at least short training programs without jeopardizing their EI.

Transportation (Again)

It has been mentioned before that we prefer Construction Craft Workers to be able to provide their own transportation. We prefer applicants to have driver’s licences and, if possible, even to own cars. We require that apprentices get to our Training Centre north of the city on their own, showing at least that much mobility.

At one point this winter we had 26 apprentices on the Local 506 out-of-work list. In every case, the reason was lack of transportation. In fact, most of the 26 could have been suspended as union members for failure to respond to three job calls. They were not suspended, out of kindness as they were apprentices.

However, it is counter-productive – and cruel, really – to train individuals who aren’t employable. We now *disqualify* applicants without driver’s licences and want to know applicants have cars or plans to get them. We hope community and youth groups trying to help individuals launch careers realize that we are not being unfair – this is reality.