

Understanding changes in working conditions



One of the protections offered by collective bargaining law is the right to bargain changes in working conditions. Collective bargaining law requires employers to bargain in good faith with the union and is written into the Revised Code of Washington, under article 41.80. It is reasonable to expect some changes in the workplace during the contract period. But if those changes affect wages, hours, or working conditions (known as **mandatory subjects**), the employer is

Example

This winter, employees at a community college returned to find a break room gone. Facilities had converted it into a prep room for a lab class. When employees notified their shop steward, she quickly investigated the situation. She found that neither the union nor Human Resources were aware of the change in working conditions.

The steward called her staff representative, and together they informed HR that the union could file an Unfair Labor Practice charge over the change and lack of notification.

required to notify the union in advance. It is not enough to notify employees/ members and it is unlawful to notify the union after the change has occurred.

There are times when the employer makes a change without notifying the union, and it can be difficult for employees to know what changes should be bargained. If you notice a change at your working conditions, contact your shop steward or staff representative as soon as possible.

As a result, the college is building a new break room, downstairs from the old one. They identified an underused office space and are putting in furniture and appliances for a new break room.

If members hadn't notified a steward or staff rep about this change in conditions, they probably would have lost a break room. It's important to let your representative know about changes, in case they can be bargained.

Examples of mandatory subjects include:

- Dress codes
- Drug/alcohol testing
- Elimination of positions
- Employee privileges (right to listen to radio, receive phone calls, smoke, etc.)
- Layoffs for economic reasons
- Meal or coffee break rules
- Outside employment rules
- Parking rules
- Pay check procedures
- Production quotas
- Safety and health rules
- Smoking rules
- Subcontracting decisions (not including decisions based on a change in the scope or direction of the enterprise)
- Tardiness rules
- Work schedules