



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS

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August 12, 2009

The Honourable Leona Aglukkaq, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Health
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Minister,

I am writing to you regarding an urgent matter that stands to impact the lives and safety of millions of Canadians. This issue involves the potential inability of fire departments across Canada to offer critical, life-saving public safety services to the citizens of Canada in the event of a flu pandemic.

The 21,000 men and women represented by the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) in Canada protect 85 per cent of the nation's population and infrastructure and are first on scene in any kind of emergency, whether it's a fire, medical emergency such a heart attack or roadway accident, or some other kind of emergency such as a building collapse, natural disaster or terrorist act.

Fire fighters are Canada's first line of defense. Our members' ability to respond to these emergencies quickly and with adequate personnel and resources is a major determining factor in the survival of citizens involved in these emergencies, as well as the protection of their property and the nation's infrastructure.

The IAFF is aware that fire fighters, like other front line emergency responders, are not currently in the first group of Canadians who would receive available antivirals and vaccines in the event of a flu pandemic, whether it is the current H1N1 pandemic or a future pandemic caused by avian or some other influenza type.

Independent analysis conducted recently has concluded that without appropriate precautions, **25 to 30 per cent of full-time fire fighters could be unavailable for duty in the event of a flu pandemic.** This would be a disaster for public safety in Canada. Fire fighting is a labour-intensive operation that requires an adequate number of personnel available in order to adequately protect the public. A fire department cannot function normally and provide adequate protection to the public with this many personnel unavailable. The resulting risk to public safety would be unimaginable.

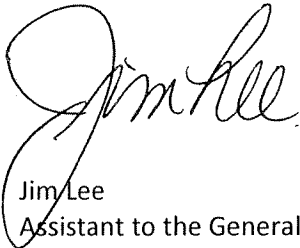


It is imperative that it becomes a matter of policy that full-time fire fighters are among the **very first** to receive available antivirals and vaccines in a flu pandemic. I urge you in the name of public safety to make this policy change.

I am aware that the Federation of Canadian Municipalities has written to you about this same issue. Please be advised that The International Association of Fire Fighters agrees wholeheartedly with the concerns they have raised about this issue.

I would like to meet with you at the earliest opportunity to discuss this issue further. In the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any additional information about our urgent request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Lee". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jim" being larger and more prominent than the last name "Lee".

Jim Lee
Assistant to the General President
Canadian Operations

- c.c. Harold A. Schaitberger, IAFF General President
- Vincent J. Bollon, IAFF General Secretary-Treasurer
- James Fennell, IAFF 15th District Vice-President
- Bruce Carpenter, IAFF 13th District Vice-President
- Lorne West, IAFF 6th District Vice-President
- Doug LeBlanc, President, Atlantic Provinces Professional Fire Fighters Association
- Fred LeBlanc, President, Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association
- Dave Naaykens, President, Manitoba Professional Fire Fighters Association
- Gerry Huget, President, Saskatchewan Professional Fire Fighters Association
- Craig MacDonald, President, Alberta Fire Fighters Association
- Michael Hurley, President, British Columbia Professional Fire Fighters Association
- Alex Forrest, IAFF Canadian Trustee
- Peter Gorman, IAFF Chief of Staff
- Basil Stewart, President, Federation of Canadian Municipalities