

Presentation by the  
**Association of  
Manitoba  
Municipalities**



to

The Standing Committee on Human Resources  
Bill 25: The Workers Compensation  
Amendment Act

Thursday, June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2005

On behalf of the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, I am pleased to appear before this committee today to present our association's views on Bill 25: The Workers Compensation Amendment Act.

For a number of years, Manitoba municipalities have been urging the Provincial Government to review how volunteer firefighters are treated under the Workers Compensation Act. We have had opportunity to express these concerns to the Provincial Government on numerous occasions and we were pleased to have the opportunity to express our views to the Workers Compensation Act (WCB) Review Committee that held meetings across the province last year.

The primary concern for municipalities is the equal treatment of part-time, volunteer firefighters when it comes to diseases caused by providing firefighting services. The Province of Manitoba has been a leader in providing compensation for occupational diseases for full time firefighters, however, part-time, voluntary firefighters were not covered under this legislation. In many communities, it is the part-time firefighters that provide the firefighting services, and they are the ones facing the hazardous situations. In certain instances, part-time firefighters are present at as many fires as their full-time counterparts in other areas.

For this reason, we have been urging the Provincial Government to add part-time firefighters to the coverage currently offered to full-time firefighters. We were pleased to see the research being done over the last few years on this issue and we are happy to see coverage extended to part-time firefighters under this Bill. We have begun discussions with the Provincial Department to look at the costs associated with extending this coverage and the best ways to balance the coverage for municipalities. It is imperative that the rates do not increase too dramatically, as many municipal budgets are already at the point of exhaustion.

A second issue our associations is pleased to see included in Bill 25 is the allowance for private top-ups of WCB benefits for part-time firefighters. Many municipalities simply cannot afford full-time fire departments and in many other communities it is not cost effective to maintain a full-time fire department. In these cases, the communities rely on volunteers to provide any local firefighting services. Volunteers are an essential component of the community, as they are often the ones that organize local projects and events. Our association has always believed that preventing private top-ups for volunteer firefighters is a disincentive for those looking to volunteer. The maximum insurable earnings clause in the current legislation is a further disincentive to attracting volunteer and we are pleased to see its removal in Bill 25. The AMM is pleased to see that Bill 25 will allow for private top-ups and remove the maximum earnings clause as this will help attract volunteers and guarantee that those who make a commitment to the community will not be penalized financially should an accident occur.

The AMM is pleased to see Bill 25 address these two primary concerns and look forward to working closely with the department in the development of the regulations. Volunteers are the life-blood of many communities and it is paramount that every possible measure be put in place to ensure they are compensated to the fullest should an accident occur. The AMM is pleased to see measures in place that extend compensation for occupational diseases to part-time, volunteer firefighters and that allow for private top-ups above WCB coverage for volunteer firefighters and is supportive of this bill.