

Oh NO!

There is a picket line at work

As OPSEU members know, sometimes it is important to take strike action to defend your rights. Many OPSEU members have walked that line proudly.

Sometimes, however, it is another group at your workplace that is forced to the streets – another OPSEU bargaining unit or members of another union altogether.

What happens when you are faced with a job action at your workplace that could include an information picket, a temporary withdrawal of services, a strike or a lockout?

Someone else's strike does not change your obligations.

Your employment rights and obligations under your collective agreement do not change during a job action by a sister union. Unless you are in a lawful strike position, your collective agreement requires you to report to work and do your job.

If your employer shuts down because of a strike, you retain your rights.

If your employer decides to close all or part of the workplace because of another bargaining unit's job action, you will be advised. You

retain your rights to wages and benefits under your collective agreement. If you are not told the workplace is closed, you must report to work as scheduled.

What about picket lines?

A striking union will probably set up picket lines to communicate with others. You should respect their picket lines, take leaflets, listen to their information. Outside your working hours, you are encouraged to join the picket lines or engage in other acts of solidarity. If you have ever been on strike, you know how much this is appreciated.



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How about access to work?

Delays often occur at picket lines. Access may be difficult or impossible. If you feel you can't cross a picket line safely to go to work, you should leave the area and immediately contact a supervisor for instructions. You should remain ready and available for work.

What if you are assigned work normally done by people on strike?

You should tell your supervisor that you object to performing the work of another bargaining unit. You should raise your concerns with the work assignment. You may ask your employer to reconsider and change the assignment. However, the "obey now, grieve later" rule applies. It requires you to follow your employer's instructions or face potential discipline for insubordination. The rule does not apply if the assignment would be unsafe for you to perform, and may not apply to activities outside of working hours.

What if the strike affects how your work is done?

A job action can affect work procedures or deadlines. It may be impossible to complete tasks on schedule if striking employees' participation is required. Priorities may change if information is not available. Contact your supervisor and ask for clear direction if you are unsure about procedures.

Extra duties

A collective withdrawal of services before a lawful strike date could violate your collec-

tive agreement and the Labour Relations Act. Some workers, like teachers, have voluntary or extracurricular activities outside working hours that they may choose to discontinue. Other workers do not have this option.

Health and Safety

Health and safety requirements must be respected during any work stoppage. Be vigilant to ensure your safety is protected. Changes in the workplace during a job action may add health and safety risks. Assess these carefully and discuss them with your local and employer.

How about disputes with the employer?

The grievance and arbitration process remains in effect and is your primary protection if you have a dispute with your employer over directions, collective agreement entitlements, or discipline.

Record-keeping can be critical to any disciplinary process or grievance proceeding. Keep notes of work assignments or discussions with supervisors regarding picket lines or job actions. Share any concerns you have with the local.

Strike stress

A job action – whether or not it is yours – can be extremely stressful. The workplace climate, relationships, and expectations may all be affected. Recognize this possible impact and seek information and support to protect your own wellbeing. If needed, consult your EAP provider, personal counsellor or doctor.

There is more information available

This is a brief summary of possible issues. Contact your local OPSEU union steward and OPSEU staff representative if you need further advice.

