



19 July 2022

Dr. Greg Keefe  
Interim President  
University of Prince Edward Island

**Re: COVID-19 Ventilation Mitigation Measures**

Dear Interim President Keefe,

We are writing to request that the campus community be provided with an update on the ventilation upgrades that have been undertaken to improve UPEI classroom air quality / ventilation.

You will no doubt agree that we find ourselves in a significantly different position than we were this time last summer. With COVID-19 cases on the rise, unchecked community spread, and one of the highest per capita rates of infection in the nation, the steps we take now will make a significant impact on the health of Islanders both in terms of the rate of infection and the overall stability of our already fragile health care system.

In addition, we've learned that a number of the recent cases have been Omicron subvariants (BA.4 or BA.5) which are able to elude existing antibodies thereby reducing the effectiveness of vaccinations and previous infection. In this context, it has never been more important to deploy every available strategy to protect our community.

Since last summer, the campus unions have impressed upon the employer the importance of addressing indoor air quality and ventilation as part of comprehensive strategy for mitigating the effects of COVID-19. The history of those engagements is available here:

<https://www.upeifa.ca/covid-19/>

Employers have a responsibility to ensure "that every reasonable precaution is taken to protect the occupational health and safety of persons at or near the workplace" (*PEI Occupational Health and Safety Act*, 12.1). With respect to building ventilation, the *Act* requires the employer to ensure that "the workplace is

adequately ventilated by either natural or mechanical means such that the atmosphere does not endanger the health and safety of workers under normal working conditions” (Regulations – 11.1).

On January 19, 2022, Ms. Jackie Podger (Vice President Administration and Finance) provided the campus community with the results of an evaluation of the ventilation systems impacting 68 classrooms (i.e. any room occupied by students and used for educational purposes). This evaluation aimed to identify classrooms and ventilations systems that did not reach the standards and best practices set by the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating, and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE).

As you are aware, the evaluation identified a number of classrooms and ventilation systems that fell below ASHRAE standards and best practices. In response, the employer committed to implementing all of the mitigation measures (short and long-term) recommended in the report. **Short-term measures** included upgrading – where appropriate – to MERV 13 filters or better and the use of portable HEPA air filtration units while **long-term measures** involved installing new, and upgrading and/or replacing, existing mechanical ventilation systems where required to meet ASHRAE requirements.

In the January communication, the employer indicated that initial steps had been taken to implement long-term recommendations in classrooms in the Atlantic Veterinary College (AVC) and the Robertson Library and that additional work is planned to address concerns in SDU Main and Steel Building.

In late February, the UPEI Faculty Association requested an update from the employer on its implementation of both short-term and long-term ventilation mitigation measures. On March 15, Ms. Podger provided the campus community with an update on the progress of implementing these measures. At that time, the campus community learned that while 40% of the MERV 13 filters had arrived and been installed, the remaining filters were scheduled to be installed by the end of March.

With respect to long-term mitigation measures, the employer indicated that a request for proposals (RFP) had been awarded for the first planning phase of improving classrooms in the AVC and Robertson Library and that another RFP was scheduled to be distributed to address concerns in Steel Building

In addition, the employer indicated that it was developing a public tender for the design of new mechanical ventilation systems in both Memorial Hall and SDU Main Building.

The employer also indicated that in preparation for 2022 Fall Semester and the 2023 Canada Games, it was developing a tender for mechanical design for Wanda Wyatt Dining Hall.

While these updates have let the campus community know that significant work has been done to develop *plans* to improve classroom air quality / ventilation, we still remain largely in the dark about whether these plans have to date led to concrete campus improvements.

It has been over four months since the campus community has been updated on these ventilation improvements and in light of growing concerns regarding the resurgence of COVID-19 this fall, we are writing to request that the employer provide an update to the campus community on its progress in implementing the recommendations outlined in the classroom ventilation report.

Specifically, we are requesting that the campus community be made aware of:

- the status of the installation of the MERV 13 filters
- what if any progress to date has been made on the implementation of the long-term ventilation mitigation measures
- what short and long-term mitigation measures the employer anticipates will be in place at the beginning of the Fall 2022 semester

Finally and as we have pointed out on a number of occasions, insofar as the UPEI Classroom Ventilation Evaluation identified spaces that could benefit from improved ventilation, we believe it is reasonable to infer that other campus workspaces may also require remediation. So while we welcome the employer's efforts to improve UPEI classroom ventilation, we feel it is once again necessary to point out that we have yet to receive a response to our repeated requests to have a **comparable ventilation evaluation of all campus workspaces**.

To be clear, while many UPEI workers spend considerable time in the classroom, many of us also carry out our work in a variety of other settings. Given the employer's obligation to take reasonable precautions to protect the occupational health and safety of persons at or near the workplace, we fail to understand why all campus workspaces have yet to receive the same scrutiny as UPEI classrooms.

We look forward to your update on these matters and your response to these important concerns.

Sincerely,



Michael Arfken  
President  
UPEI Faculty Association



Ashley Clark  
President  
CUPE-1870

cc:

Mr. Pat Sinnott, Chair, Board of Governors, UPEI  
Dr. Greg Naterer, Vice President Academic & Research, UPEI  
Ms. Jackie Podger, Vice President Administration & Finance, UPEI