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ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO

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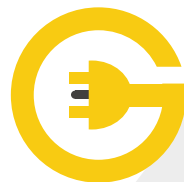
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## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

### Charting the Course Ahead

By Dan Lancia

ECAO hosted its annual industry conference from Sept. 21-24 at the J.W. Marriott Resort and Spa on Lake Rosseau in Muskoka near Port Carling. The resort and setting were both beautiful, the business sessions informative, and the keynote speakers extremely funny. Based on generally good feedback it's probably fair to categorize our 2016 conference as a success. Of course, as with any undertaking of this magnitude, there were hiccups from which we will learn and improve our way of doing things going forward.

For the first time in many years, we retained a professional travel management and event planning consulting firm to help us with the final planning and execution of our Muskoka conference, and we anticipate a long-term, mutually beneficial relationship with Cubed Inc. for the foreseeable future. They have already made a number of suggestions to improve our 2017 conference in Munich, Germany, including designing an impressive

sponsorship opportunities brochure. And they have brought us into the 21st Century with online registration. That means no more faxing and misplaced registrations. Everything from conference registration to reserving hotel accommodations, signing up for excursions or optional events and even flight options with a discount code for those booking with Air Canada can be done in one place with a few clicks of a mouse. Our conference registration for 2017 is now live on our homepage at [www.ecao.org](http://www.ecao.org).

We will endeavour to raise the bar with sponsorship for this conference. For the first time, we are reaching out to manufacturers, suppliers and distributors to offer partnership opportunities to them. Collectively, our membership spends tens, if not hundreds, of millions of dollars with them every year. We should leverage that buying power to help us put on an even better conference. The program of events as it is currently outlined is subject to change if we secure opportunities to improve the program.

We also held our Annual General Meeting on Sept. 24, at which our membership passed a special resolution to temporarily increase the number of board members for one year to 22. In the past, we have been able to meet the provisions of our bylaw with a 19-member board because some members have been on the board in a dual or multiple representative capacity, such as representing a geographic area in addition to, for example, the line or communications sector, which the bylaw says must be represented on the board. In the past, I have served simultaneously as both ECAO's president and the chair of the Electrical Trade Bargaining Agency (ETBA). Both positions are entitled to a seat on our board of directors.



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We have established a bylaw review committee which will make recommendations for necessary updates and changes to the bylaw within the framework allowed by the Ontario Corporations Act in order to best address our new reality.

Sadly, also during our industry conference in Muskoka, we received word that long-time board member, ETBA member, and ECAO friend George Docherty had passed away. George was a veritable institution in our industry for decades and will be dearly missed. Our thoughts are with his family.

As a result of our Joint Electrical Promotion Plan (JEPP) strategic planning session in June, we have moved ahead with the hiring of a business development manager to promote the use of properly trained and certified electricians and electrical contractors to purchasers of construction around the province. We can now confirm that the successful candidate is Sherri Haigh, a well-known and widely-respected communications professional who most recently helped establish the messaging to set the Ontario College of Trades on a solid footing.

At the same time, we welcome Kevin Valier as our new communications manager at ECAO. Kevin joined ECAO in October and brings two decades worth of experience in media and public relations to our team.

Collectively, ECAO and JEPP will work to convince the government that we need mandatory minimum training and certification standards to install electric vehicle charging stations as the provincial government executes its announced intentions to install up to 500 charging stations in the next while.

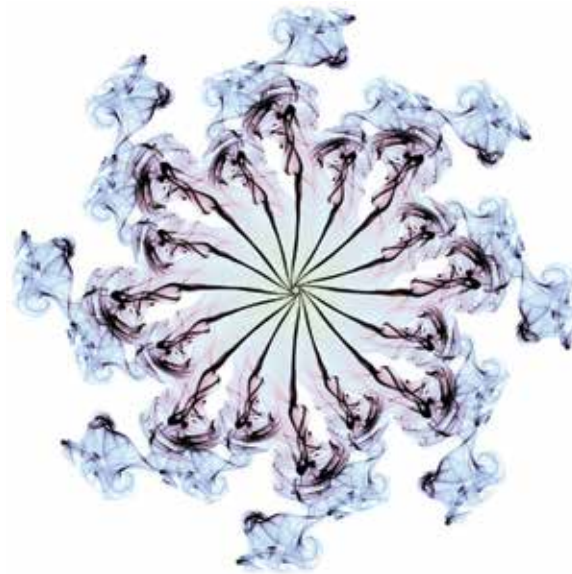
ECAO was active at this year's NECA conference in October, attending a number of business sessions on leadership, communication, and productivity as well as networking with NECA's senior training staff and representatives of some of the major manufacturers and suppliers.

And finally, provincial Attorney General Yasir Naqvi released the long-awaited independent review of the *Construction Lien Act* (CLA) after holding onto it for nearly five months. Written by noted

construction lawyers Bruce Reynolds and Sharon Vogel, we think the review is thorough, balanced, and well thought out. It devotes a significant amount of attention to recommending that prompt payment be legislated in the public and private sector and the reasons why. Among its many other recommendations is one for an expedited and binding dispute resolution mechanism.

As with any undertaking which recommends widespread reform, the success of

our efforts will be defined by what the legislation ultimately looks like, and we will remain vigilant and active in that process. Bruce and Sharon seem to have grasped the fundamental disparity and injustice that surrounds payment terms in the construction industry, and it will be vital that they are included in the drafting of the legislation, which is the second part of the promise made by the provincial government when it committed to the review more than two-and-a-half years ago.



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# Reynolds Review of the *Construction Lien Act* Could Mean Prompt Payment Legislation

By Jeff Koller

The long-awaited *Construction Lien Act* (CLA) review, authored by construction law experts Bruce Reynolds and Sharon Vogel, was finally released by Attorney General Yasir Naqvi on Sept. 26 after months of delays and amid growing doubts that the provincial government ever intended to release it.

Two things became readily apparent:

- 1) Bruce and Sharon did a very good job of balancing our interests – what we want to see in new legislation – against what opponents have in the past criticised as deficiencies in a previous attempt to introduce a prompt payment bill, and;

- 2) Bruce and Sharon must be included in the next step, which is turning the review with its recommendations into legislation.

Naqvi himself promised to introduce legislation in the spring of 2017, as directed in his new mandate letter from Premier Kathleen Wynne. He told an audience at COCA's annual construction day reception at Queen's Park that a modernized *Construction Lien Act* will be passed into law by the fall of 2017, and that it will contain prompt payment legislation.

So what's in the report?

Recommendation number 47 states: "We recommend that a prompt payment regime be legislated in Ontario and that it be applied to both the public and private sectors. Prompt payment should be implemented by creating a statutory scheme to be implied into all construction contracts that do not contain equivalent terms (p 192)."

The next recommendation follows up by spelling out the contractual terms and relationships that should exist between the owner and general contractor, and then between the general contractor and the trade and sub-contractors that it deals with and so on down the supply chain. It further recommends that the legislation contain provisions for GCs to notify subcontractors of non-payment by owners "and undertake to commence or continue proceedings necessary to enforce payment so as to defer their payment obligations (p 194)."

The report also recommends an expedited and binding dispute resolution mechanism, mandatory project trust funds, significant holdback reform, effective protection in the residential sector, improved protection on leaseholds and renovations, and ultimately the right to suspend work when all else fails.

The report also recommends extending the time period allowed for the preservation and protection of liens, which addresses one of the most significant concerns with the existing *Construction Lien Act*, which is that by the time a contractor realizes that he or she is not going to get paid, their lien rights will often have already expired.

We have always maintained that prompt payment legislation should be separate from the CLA, as one addresses delinquent payment and the other non-payment. With legislated prompt payment, it is likely that reliance on the Act would be significantly diminished. Contractors would not need to file liens if they are being paid promptly every 30 days.



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The point of this is that we as a trade contractor community have always been skeptical of the wisdom of including prompt payment provisions in a revised *Construction Lien Act*, in part at least because the current Act contains no provision for payment considerations and we couldn't envision how such considerations could be incorporated.

When Bruce and Sharon embarked on their year-and-a-half-long consultation process, they told us that their mandate was broad enough to make recommendations that would be all-inclusive. They seem to have achieved that goal with this report.

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Questions remain about what will constitute proper invoicing and we want to ensure that delinquent payment terms of 60 or 90 days or longer aren't merely transferred to the front end under the guise of "proper invoicing." But this review and its recommendations is definitely a progressive move forward.

What remains to be seen is what the legislation will ultimately look like, and on that front we must be vigilant in monitoring its development and offering input.

The report must be adopted and translated into legislation in its entirety, not piecemeal. If a modernized CLA adopts only those parts of the report that satisfy critics of Bill 69, then it will be a failure. And Bruce Reynolds and Sharon Vogel must be included as part of the team that drafts the legislation, which is part two of the provincial government's original promise when it first committed to the independent review and settled on its choice for reviewers.

Bruce and Sharon clearly understand the fundamental injustice that has plagued the construction industry for decades. Let's hope the government does too.



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# Project Managers' Competencies

## The Need for Management Training

By Dr. Awad Hanna, Professor and Chair of Construction Engineering and Management Program, University of Wisconsin-Madison

The Canadian construction industry represents a significant portion of Canada's GDP (Gross Domestic Product). According to statistics, in 2015 there were 1.5 million Canadians employed by the construction industry which represents more than eight per cent of people working aged 15 and older. In addition, the rate of growth of the construction industry is more than twice the rate of growth of all other industries.

Project managers contribute significantly to the success of the construction industry. In a labor intensive trade, such as electrical construction, project managers are a critical component of profitability. Project managers allocate resources to ensure that all project goals are met, in terms of budget and time constraints, without compromising safety or quality. In addition, an integral part of their job is to create a motivational and satisfying work environment for the workers.

With the introduction of new project delivery systems such as Design-Build (DB) and Integrated Project Delivery (IPD), project managers are faced with even more challenging complexity. This demands that they have a skillset that includes more than simply technical abilities and experience. Cognitive, interpersonal, and leadership skills, usually referred to as soft skills, are also necessary.

Project managers are usually selected and assigned to projects based on their technical skills which include demonstrating an understanding of job description, knowledge of technology used in the electrical industry, and business and accounting acumen. These technical skills can typically be measured in terms of educational background, work experience, and certifications such as Gold Seal. While technical aspects are generally easier to teach and assess in a quantitative manner, it is equally important to have a

quantitative assessment for soft skills. Cognitive and interpersonal skills are some of the hardest traits to measure. They show a person's ability to take initiative, demonstrate courage and self-awareness, and be influential and analytical. They can also include attributes like being enthusiastic, mature, reliable, and assertive. Leadership skills include building trust, engaging others, team building, and creating lines of communication.

Quantitative measurement of project managers' competencies was the subject of a recent study that I undertook with my research team and many construction organizations. The research team developed a list of 49 competencies divided over four main categories. These categories are knowledge and experience, management, cognitive and personal attributes, and leadership skills. Specific attributes within each category are shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1





The research team developed an Excel-based tool that can provide company executives with a quantitative assessment of project managers' performance in the four categories listed on page 12. In addition, the tool enables the user to identify training needs for project managers in order to improve their effectiveness. The input of the Excel-based tool includes company executives' responses to 131 questions for the 49 attributes stated on page 12. The output of the tool includes an overall project manager's assessment score displayed graphically as shown in Figure 2 below. In addition, it lists competencies with exceptionally high or low scores.

### Output of Quantitative Assessment of Project Management tool

The Electrical Contractors Association of Ontario (ECAO) and I are embarking on major training efforts for project managers based on the information provided by my research. A successful 10-day training program that included

seminars covering technical, management, cognitive, and leadership skills was provided in September of this year in Sudbury, Ontario.

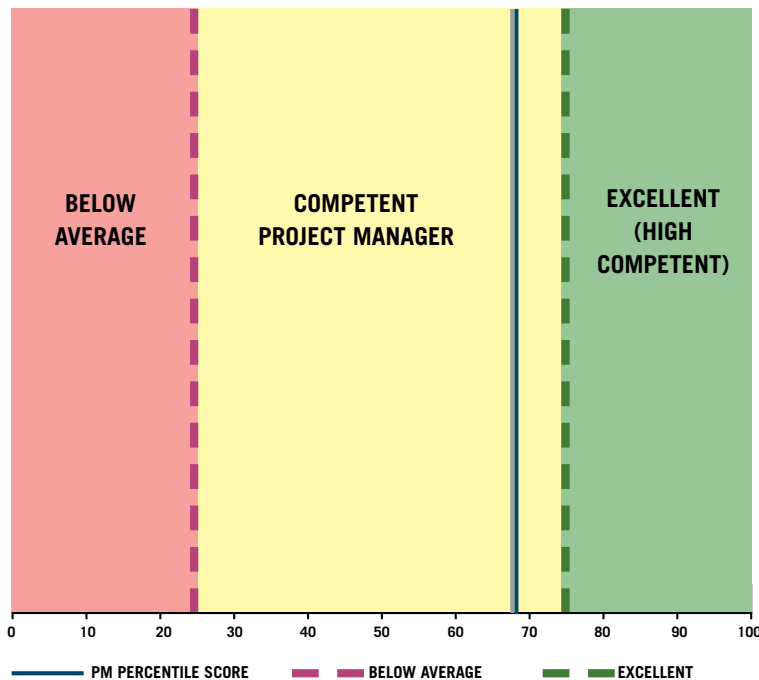
The majority of project managers in today's electrical construction industry are either managers coming from the electrical trade or managers with college or high school education, both whom lack the required soft skills and some technical skills. To fill the gap between complex job requirements and managers' education background, electrical contractors need to begin and sustain internal education programs to upgrade their manager's skills through one-on-one coaching, mentoring, seminars, conferences, and industry-wide networking.

*Dr. Awad Hanna is a professor and chair of the Construction Engineering and Management program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Dr. Hanna is also a provider of management education and longtime associate to ECAO. He can be reached at [ashanna@wisc.edu](mailto:ashanna@wisc.edu).*

Figure 2

**GRAPH**  
(Displays PM Percentile Score versus the industry Standard Distribution)  
**PM'S INDUSTRY PERCENTILE SCORE:**

**67.9%**



The dark blue vertical line represents the PM's industry PERCENTILE score. The score ranges from 0 to 100 percent. Below 25% the PM scores below average. Above 75% the PM demonstrates a very high (excellent) level of competence.

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## What does this mean for you as an LEC and/or ME?

What does "failed to comply with or meet requirements of this Part" really mean? You may have questions about the Standards of Conduct because it's not always easy to link legal jargon to the work that you do every day. This is especially true if you aren't aware these expectations exist in the first place. The Electrical Contractors Registration Agency Advisory Council and the Electrical Safety Authority (ECRA/ESA) asked themselves these questions.

Many members of ECRA/ESA are LECs, and they understand how critical it is to be aware of the laws that the industry follows in a simplified easy to understand guideline. The result is the Licence Holder Standards of Conduct that you'll find inserted in the summer issue of Plugged In and on [esasafe.com](http://esasafe.com). It is a plain language guide to the obligations LECs and MEs have been subject to in the *Electricity Act* since 2005. There

are no new requirements; it is simply an explanation of existing laws. Not following the Standards of Conduct is a legal cause for discipline from ECRA/ESA.

We encourage you to share this information with your colleagues and employees to make sure the whole industry operates and competes on the same playing field and contributes to public safety and consumer protection.

For more information email: [ESA.Licensing@electricalsafety.on.ca](mailto:ESA.Licensing@electricalsafety.on.ca)

## Table A

### Nine Categories of Misconduct

- the applicant or authorization holder will not carry out the activities in accordance with the law;
- the applicant or authorization holder will not carry out the activities safely;
- the applicant or authorization holder lacks the basic resources necessary to carry out the activities;
- the applicant or authorization holder will not conduct himself or herself with honesty and integrity or in accordance with the principle of protecting consumers;
- the applicant or authorization holder lacks the training, experience, qualifications or skills prescribed by the regulations;
- the applicant or authorization holder failed to comply with or to meet a requirement of this Part, the regulations or an order of the Authority;
- the authorization holder failed to comply with a restriction, limitation or condition of the authorization;
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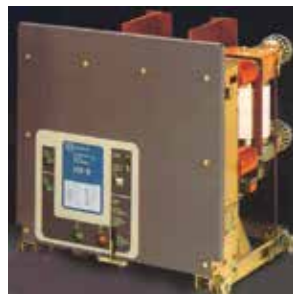
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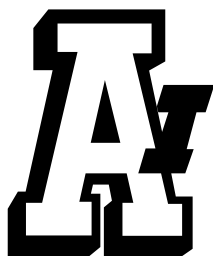
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# Muskoka Provides Beautiful Backdrop for Annual ECAO Conference

By Kevin Vallier

Amidst the stunning backdrop of Lake Rosseau in Ontario's cottage country, ECAO hosted its annual industry conference at the J.W. Marriott Sept. 21 – 24.

The conference teed off Wednesday with attendees playing a round of golf at the stunning, Nick Faldo designed, The Rock Golf Club, providing members and associate members with a great networking opportunity and a spectacular round of golf at one of the country's best designed courses.

Things ramped up in earnest Thursday morning with a keynote presentation by the power couple of Canadian comedy, Naomi Snieckus & Matt Baram. The pair had the audience laughing from start to finish with their unique style of blending humour and inspiration.

The three-day conference was packed with informative sessions on a variety of topics from bid-shopping to business growth as well as some fun and adventure with activities like horseback riding, boat tours and ATV adventures.

The first business session of the conference featured Dan Leduc of Norton Rose Fulbright LLP providing an informative and insightful talk on Tender Law in Canada: Bid Shopping – The Gift that Keeps on Giving. Dan broke down the complicated arena of contract law to its basic fundamentals and provided excellent real life examples involving both contractors and subcontractors from various view points for the audience.

Business growth and great customer service are obviously two of the most important factors when owning your own company and it's what business consultant Jim Baston led a discussion on during his excellent presentation entitled: Beyond Great Service, The Electrician's Role in Business Growth. Jim discussed the importance of focusing on four key components that are the cornerstones of going beyond great service: support, clarity, skills and integration. Jim summarized his presentation by stating that a beyond great service approach will drive:

- More revenues and improved profitability
- Differentiated and valued service experience
- Increased customer satisfaction and retention
- More referrals
- More predictable labour loading
- Exceptional learning environment
- Higher levels of employee engagement and satisfaction

The following morning started off with a hilarious performance by comedian Graham Chittenden. Tailoring his act to the industry, the audience could relate to Graham's relentlessly funny jokes and the laughter that filled the room from start to finish was proof positive of that.

The remainder of the day was filled with more fun social activities and informative business sessions including important and relevant topics like Construction Forecast presented by economist Mark Caseletto of Reed Construction Data Communications, followed later in the day by a great panel discussion on WSIB topics led by Jean-Surge Bidal – Executive Director of WSIB's Strategic Revenue Policy branch – and featuring industry insiders Fred Black, Rob Boswell, Jelena Markov, Jennifer Mei-Fisher, Kelly Burke, and Shannon Kemp. The panel discussion focused on rate framework modernization highlighting the three step approach: 1) Employer Classification, 2) Class Level Premium Rate Setting and 3) Employer Level Premium Rate Adjustments. The panel provided for an excellent discussion and prompted great questions and comments from audience members.



Ove Bakmand receives the Douglas J. B. Wright Award from ECAO First Vice-President Mark Lloyd and President Dan Lancia.

A vendor trade show featuring many of ECAO's Associate Members was held throughout the conference giving attendees a chance to talk to company representatives and get a first-hand look at what these great companies have to offer.

One of the highlights of the conference was a Rousseau Island plane tour that gave conference goers a spectacular aerial view of some of the most beautiful nature in all of Canada. Not only was there an opportunity to see Muskoka from the air but a boat cruise aboard the R.M.S. Wenonah II toured guests around the beautiful waterways as well. Built in 2002 with all the style and grace of a 1907 Muskoka vessel, Wenonah II combines turn-of-the-century charm with modern conveniences including three dining rooms and three decks offering the ultimate lake view experience.

Feedback was positive and attendees enjoyed the informative presentations, good discussion amongst colleagues, as well as the fun and adventurous activities. "Like any large conference

*Continued on page 22*

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# Snapshots

of 2016 Conference  
Muskoka, ON









Accepting awards for the 2015 R.H. (Hugh) Carroll Safety Awards are: Gregg Mellon (Mellon Inc), Steve Thrasher (Plan Group), Dan Lancia (ECAO President and Presenter of awards), Mike Rose (Rogol Electric), Peter Calabrese (Black & McDonald) and Terry Moore (Trade-mark).



some things can be improved and we received good constructive feedback and suggestions that we noted and will incorporate where possible into our 2017 conference,” explained ECAO Board President Dan Lancia.

The conference wrapped up with the Annual General Meeting where ECAO Executive Director Jeff Koller outlined the key goals and priorities for the year ahead. Koller explained ECAO’s focus should be to seek the best possible deal with the union in order to enable its members to compete fairly for work in Ontario while ensuring

sustainability and profitability. ECAO should also be an ongoing resource for interpretation of the collective agreement and provide support for grievances and disputes with the union that have province-wide implications.

Second, ECAO must be a credible advocate for the unionized electrical industry at the provincial government level to ensure that legislators understand the impact of their actions.

There has been a lot of change in the past year at ECAO but there is now a strategy to move forward providing members with informative

resources, information and representation that will help grow our industry and ensure that ECAO provides value for our members.

Also at the AGM, several award presentations were made including this year’s R.H. (Hugh) Carroll Safety Award Winners.

Taking home the top safety awards were Rogol Electric Company Ltd. (Category: Rate Group 704 – up to 50,000 Total Work Hours), Trade-Mark Industrial Inc. (Category: Rate Group 704 – 50,001 to 200,000 Total Work Hours), Mellon Inc. (Category: Rate Group 704 – 200,000 to 500,000 Total Work Hours), Plan Group (Category: Rate Group 704 – over 500,000 Total Work Hours), Grid Link Corp (Category: Rate Group 830 – up to 50,000 Total Work Hours) and Black & McDonald Ltd. (Category: Rate Group 830 – over 50,000 Total Work Hours).

The DJB Wright Award, presented annually to the electrical contractor who has made outstanding contributions to the industry, was awarded this year to Ove Bakmand who gave a very sincere acceptance speech and noted from his humble beginnings and through a combination of hard work, perseverance and some luck, he has been blessed with a successful business for many years.

The Douglas J. B. Wright Award was created in 1992 by the Electrical Contractors Association of Ontario and Ontario Electrical Construction Co. Ltd. to pay tribute to individuals who best exemplify the dedication and commitment to the electrical contracting industry as exhibited by Doug Wright through his years of service. Since 1992 this recognition has been bestowed on 18 individuals who have left their lasting stamp on our industry.

The keynote speaker at this year’s AGM was Ian Cunningham, President of the Council of Ontario Construction Associations (COCA). Ian provided an overview of the role of COCA, their approach to advocacy and promotion of the industry as well as their commitment to partnership.

Looking ahead to next year, the 2017 annual conference will be held in historic Munich, Germany, May 21-27. The conference website is now live at <http://ecaomunich2017.ca> and for the first time you can register online. Business sessions will feature industry leaders from both Munich and abroad including an accredited half-day seminar on Managing Field Productivity To Improve The Bottom Line and many more of the latest and most important industry topics.

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# Stirring the Pot



## Medical Marijuana in the Workplace

By Susanne Balpataky

The use of medical marijuana continues to rise across the country and employers must increasingly find ways to deal with this new reality. Until June 2015, the only legal method of consuming medical marijuana was to smoke it. However, in the Supreme Court of Canada decision of *R v Smith*, 2015 SCC 34, the Court held that a medical access regime that only permits access to dried marijuana unjustifiably violates the guarantee of life, liberty and security of the person contrary to s. 7 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Users of medical marijuana may now ingest the drug in a variety of ways. Despite the controversy surrounding its use, employers should treat medical marijuana like any other prescription medication.

Simply because an employee has a prescription for marijuana does not entitle him to use it unfettered in the workplace. Employees have never had

the right to work while being knowingly impaired or unable to perform the duties of their job, for example, because of powerful pain medication they are using. That has not changed.

Section 5(1) of the Ontario Human Rights Code, R.S.O. 1990, c.H-19, however, provides an individual with the right to equal treatment with respect to their employment without discrimination because of disability. Medical marijuana may be prescribed for a variety of conditions such as chronic pain, arthritis, cancer and multiple sclerosis, all of which fall

**It is important to note that employers must be proactive in ascertaining whether accommodation of an employee is required on grounds of disability.**

within the definition of "disability" contained in the Code and engage an employer's duty to accommodate to the point of undue hardship.

Which begs the question: what constitutes undue hardship?

Answering this question requires a consideration of three factors:

1. The cost of accommodation;
2. Any outside funding available to subsidize the cost of accommodation; and
3. Any health and safety concerns with respect to accommodation.

The third factor will likely be the most relevant when dealing with medical marijuana use on the job. In certain safety-sensitive environments, an employer will still be justified in enforcing a zero-tolerance policy for drug use, including marijuana. A heavy-equipment operator, even one with debilitating back pain, for example, will almost certainly be prohibited by her employer from using pre-

scribed medical cannabis on the job. The use would likely (i) impair her ability to perform her job and (ii) would pose a safety risk to



the other employees on site. However, except in this type of safety-sensitive environment, a blanket zero-tolerance policy for marijuana use and possession is no longer enforceable.

It is important to note that employers must be proactive in ascertaining whether accommodation of an employee is required on grounds of disability. The duty to accommodate, however, is a joint responsibility and an employee therefore has an obligation to inform the employer of the need for accommodation. It is further incumbent on an employee to cooperate in providing adequate information to substantiate the employee's limitations and the impact of his disability on his ability to perform the essential duties of his position. The employee's refusal to cooperate in the accommodation process will be taken into account when assessing whether an employer has met its duty to accommodate.

When confronted, therefore, by an employee who asserts the right to use marijuana for medical reasons, an employer, as part of the accommodation process, can and should request medical documentation detailing whether the medical marijuana use affects the employee's ability to carry out his assigned duties. If that documentation reveals a significant impairment of the employee's ability to safely perform his duties, the employer would not be required to accommodate the employee's medical use of marijuana. In our heavy-machine operator example, accommodating the use would cause the employer undue hardship in light of the safety concerns involved. The employer's obligation to accommodate, however, is not then at an end. The employer would likely be obligated to consider reassigning the employee to different duties that do not engage safety concerns, or alternatively, allow the employee to take a leave of absence.

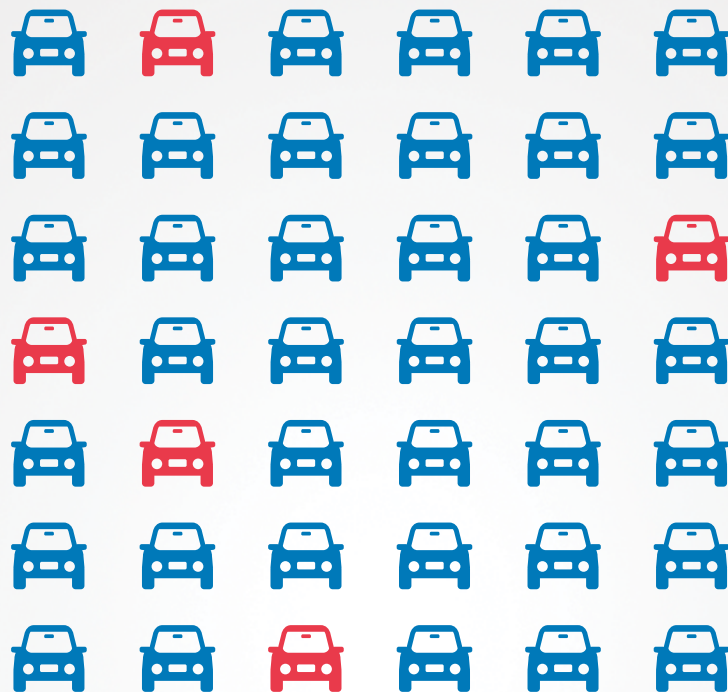
Use of medical marijuana in the workplace also engages the employer's responsibilities under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c.O-1, specifically s. 25. Pursuant to that section, employers have an obligation to "take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances for the protection of a worker." In addition to accommodating an employee with a disability, the employer must also have regard for the safety of other workers, for example from second-hand smoke caused by an employee who seeks to smoke medical marijuana in the workplace.

In light of the broadening impact of medical marijuana use in the workplace, employers should review their current drug and alcohol policies to address the legitimate use of medical marijuana in the workplace and establish well-defined parameters for that use.

*Susanne Balpataky is a partner at Spiegel Nichols Fox LLP and has practiced at the firm since her call to the bar in 1991. Susanne is an experienced commercial litigator and employment lawyer with expertise in employment litigation acting for both employers and employees. Her prior experience working at the Ontario Human Rights*

*Commission has proved invaluable in acting for employer respondents in several human rights complaints. Her commercial litigation practice encompasses a broad range of matters including commercial contract disputes, shareholder disputes, negligence and breach of trust claims, mortgage fraud, fraudulent conveyances, as well as enforcement of creditors' rights, bankruptcy and insolvency matters, and estate litigation.*

*Susanne has appeared as lead counsel on matters before the Ontario Superior Court of Justice (including the Commercial List, Bankruptcy Court and Estates Court), the Ontario Divisional Court and the Ontario Court of Appeal.*



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# New Study Examines Changing Face of Electrical Contractor Business

By Kevin Vallier

It's no secret that the electrical contracting business is going through some of the most significant changes it's ever faced. Rapidly changing technologies, fragile economic conditions and increased customer expectations make for very challenging times and an uncertain future.

Electro- Federation Canada's (EFC) latest study takes a deeper look at these factors and others when it comes to their largest customer segment – electrical contractors. The report, titled “20/20 Vision: The Future of the Canadian Electrical Contractor” examines the strengths, challenges, opportunities and threats Canadian electrical contractors face today and will most certainly have to deal with in the future.

To gain a wide perspective on the electrical contracting market, EFC collaborated with numerous industry partners including Canadian Electrical Contractors Association, Kerrwil Publications, Ontario Electrical League, as well as enlisting the support from a Market Research Committee comprised of industry professionals from member companies. EFC gathered their information through two focus groups as well as an online industry survey sent to electrical contractors across the country. A total of 343 survey responses were collected.

The report is broken down into six detailed findings; customer relationships, business scope, technological advancements, training and



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development, demographics and staffing, and business profitability impacts.

Probably the issue most at the forefront is the pre-purchasing trends that have been taking place during the past few years. This growing trend of end users pre-purchasing materials is having a significant negative impact on a variety of fronts often resulting in negative outcomes like increased costs and safety risks. What may seem like a cheaper option at the outset often results in an unmitigated disaster. This issue was a significant concern with electrical contractors in the focus groups used for this report. Contractors consistently raised concerns about loss of control as well as being relegated to just labourers. The big question is who assumes responsibility if a product that is pre-purchased, online for example, doesn't work? Products purchased by the end-user often show up on a job site not meeting safety standards (sometimes they arrive with no safety certifications at all) or are simply the wrong product.

Peter Calabrese, Vice President at Black & McDonald, stated at a panel discussion on the report that not only are there quality and safety concerns of products purchased by end users, but they can also result in logistical issues. "We plan for parts to arrive on the site when we need them. One of the issues with the end user going online and purchasing a product is that everything shows up on a job site at once and we may not need it for weeks so now the question is how do we transport it, store it etc. until we are ready to install it."

Technological advancements and their impact on the industry was of significant concern, but also seen as a big opportunity for electrical contractors as well. In fact, according to survey results, in the next five years, nearly one-third will diversify their businesses to meet technological advancements in the marketplace.

In terms of what specific technologies will have the biggest impact on the market, 87 per cent of respondents said lighting technology, 53 per cent said fire/life safety systems and 52 per cent indicated building automation and controls.

In his foreword for the study results publication, Jeff Koller, Electrical Contractors Association of Ontario's Executive Director, said that end users purchasing products is a misguided attempt to lower costs, often times without properly understanding what materials are needed for the project or the impact on what the contractor has priced. "Unionized contractors have very little control over their labour supply or the cost of that labour,"

"One of the issues with the end user going online and purchasing a product is that everything shows up on a job site at once and we may not need it for weeks..."

- Peter Calabrese, Vice President, Black & McDonald

Koller explained. "The union controls who the contractor can hire and who is accepted into training as a new apprentice, as well as what the labour rate will be in a competitive bid. Non-unionized contractors, by contrast, can hire and fire at will and bid jobs at whatever labour rate they are willing to pay which results in them having much greater control over their business model," he added.

The ECAO and its members pride themselves on the impeccable safety record contractors and unionized electricians have worked hard to achieve year after year.

Safety is always at the forefront of every job and that includes ordering and installing the proper products with the appropriate

safety certificates. Cutting corners to save a few bucks up front is not an option and will cost more in the long run. It's unacceptable.

From challenges come opportunities and this report provides good information and food for thought for electrical contractors on a number of fronts as they determine their own best course of action when making strategic business decisions. Some will make the decision to diversify into areas of new technology, some will find their niche market and make that their core business, while others will stay the course. Regardless of what individual electrical contractors decide is best for their respective companies, one thing won't change: their commitment to safety and quality. You can't buy that online.



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- ◆ The CECA Canadian Student Chapter at the University of Toronto has made the Final Three for a second year in a row at the 2016 ELECTRI International "Green Energy Challenge". Finalists awards to be given out at 2016 NECA Convention in Boston
- ◆ In 2006, CECA & IBEW operationalized NETCO to provide national strategic leadership on workforce development in the electrical industry. NETCO promotes national standards, apprenticeship and journeyperson skills training with a focus on Red Seal electrical trades. It also has an advocacy mandate.

**For more on CECA – find us at [www.ceca.org](http://www.ceca.org)**



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- A. Fire Marshall
- B. Qualified person
- C. Company technician
- D. Building Owner
- E. Manufacturer

2. Written records of tests and repairs shall be kept for?

- A. 1 year
- B. 2 years
- C. 3 years

D. 4 years

E. six months

3. The sound pressure in sleeping rooms shall not be less than?

- A. 65 dBA
- B. 75 dBA
- C. 85 dBA
- D. 87 dBA
- E. 100 dBA

Answers  
1. D 2. B 3. B



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**20V** MAX\*  
LITHIUM ION

**COMPATIBLE**  
Compatible with  
all our 20V MAX\* tools

**60V** MAX\*  
LITHIUM ION

**EXPANDABLE**  
Brings power to a whole  
new lineup of tools

**120V** MAX\*  
LITHIUM ION

**POWERFUL**  
Combine two 60V MAX\* batteries  
for revolutionary cordless freedom

**GUARANTEED TOUGH.®**

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