

## CHANGES TO WORKER SAFETY RULES SPARKS OUTRAGE



Changes made to rules that were formed to protect overnight workers at B.C. gas stations and convenience stores, have sparked protests by workers who feel that it is a betrayal by the government and that it has backtracked on its assurances made after the death of a gas station attendant at Maple Ridge, B.C. gas station. The New Work Safe BC regulations, that came into force from Sunday, allow business owners “to have just one person on duty overnight as long as there is a surveillance camera, a locked safe that can’t be opened, a panic button and good lighting. The employee must be 19 years or older.” The changes have diluted laws, made in the wake of the death of Grant Depatie, a young 24 year old, who was dragged to his death as he tried to stop a “gas and dash.” The law, ‘Grant’s Law,’ named after him, required employers to have more than one employee working night shifts, between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. or that they “construct safety barricades between the employee and the customers.” Stephen Von Sychowski, chair of both the Employee Action Rights Network and the B.C. Federation of Labour Young Workers’ Committee, said they want WorkSafeBC to reassess and revoke the changes. “Grant’s law basically put in protection for people working late-night shifts and now with these new regulations it really waters it down,” he said. The B.C. Federation of Labour which has been campaigning for stronger safety provisions for late night retail workers working alone staged a weekend demonstration against the changes alleging that it reduced worker safety. WorkSafeBC however, refuted the allegations saying that the “third option” also offers thorough safeguards and was created in response to complaints from employers who were facing problems in meeting the earlier regulations. Federation president Jim Sinclair has blamed WorkSafeBC and the provincial government of succumbing to pressure from private liquor and convenience store operators who want to cut costs. Doug DePatie, whose son Grant was working alone when he was killed, has also condemned the changes. “I think there is going to be dire consequences because of these changes,” he said, “It is putting workers at risk. It leaves the workers like sitting ducks.” Doug DePatie also pointed out; that the gas station his son was working at the night of his death also had cameras. “When you are being robbed, it does nothing for your safety,” he said of the cameras and the panic button. “You need two people on the shift.” Steven Von Sychowski said that a petition campaign has been launched and it will be presented to the government to show their outrage.

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