



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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VIHA cleaning contractor, Compass, cited for health & safety violations

Insufficient training and supervision, improper accident investigations continue, despite CDC recommendations on C. difficile outbreak

Over the past two months WorkSafeBC has issued nine orders against Vancouver Island Health Authority's cleaning contractor for ongoing health and safety violations at both Royal Jubilee and Victoria General hospitals.

WorkSafe found that Compass fails to conduct meaningful accident investigations and fails to provide housekeeping staff with the training, information and personal protective equipment needed to safely handle hazardous cleaning chemicals.

The report also points to systemic flaws in health and safety practices, such as workers who are "over-tasked" and under pressure to "save time", which leads to shortcuts and errors.

The most recent orders were issued on June 22, just days after VIHA released the findings of two investigations into a major C. difficile outbreak.

Hospital Employees' Union secretary-business manager, Judy Darcy, says these citations cast doubt on VIHA's assurances that Compass has responded to the recommendations of recent reports from the Centre for Disease Control and the health authority's own Medical Health Officer.

"Compass and VIHA have not adequately addressed the serious failures in health and safety protocols and the gaps in training," says Darcy, "You cannot have safe patients and hospitals if the housekeeping staff do not have the training or the time to be safe themselves."

Over the past year, WorkSafe has issued similar citations against Compass for ongoing violations in the Nanaimo Regional General and Cowichan District hospitals. NRGH was the site of a deadly C. difficile outbreak that began in June of 2008.

"When will VIHA learn that preventing outbreaks is less costly to patients' health and to their own budgets," says Darcy.

In their August 2008 report on the NRGH outbreak, the BC Centre for Disease Control found that "there were insufficient numbers of cleaning staff to meet the basic daily needs of the facility and they were not adequately trained in appropriate cleaning procedures for a healthcare facility."

The WorkSafe citations are based on visits to Victoria General Hospital on May 22, 2009 and to Royal Jubilee Hospital on April 21 and again on June 15, 2009.

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Inspection reports are linked to the online news release at www.heu.org

