



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

# NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## WCB cites VIHA's cleaning contractor for contravening health and safety regulations

The British corporation contracted by the Vancouver Island Health Authority to clean a number of its major hospitals and extended care facilities was issued 16 separate orders over six months in 2008 by the Workers' Compensation Board of B.C. for contravening health and safety laws.

Acting on complaints from the Hospital Employees' Union, WCB investigators found that Compass Group had contravened health and safety regulations at Nanaimo Regional General Hospital (NRGH) and Cowichan District Hospital (CDH) in Duncan.

In 2004, VIHA signed a five-year, \$100 million contract with Compass to provide cleaning and food services at a number of its hospitals and extended care facilities.

Investigators cited Compass for its failure to provide adequate health and safety training to workers; train workers in the safe use of toxic cleaning agents or in dealing with spills of hazardous substances; keep records of health and safety incident investigations, and have an exposure plan for workers who are exposed to materials contaminated with blood.

HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy says the health authority needs to take active responsibility for the health and safety record of Compass Group.

"These orders make it clear that the health authority's cleaning contractor is not paying due care and attention to the health and safety of hospital cleaning staff," says Darcy.

"In an era of superbugs and increasingly virulent diseases, these poor health and safety practices put everyone who uses our hospitals at risk – not just workers.

"VIHA may have contracted out the cleaning of its biggest hospitals, but it hasn't contracted out its responsibility to operate safe, clean hospitals for patients, visitors and workers."

The WCB orders were issued between May and October 2008. The findings included:

- Failure to provide written procedures on the use, storage and disposal of highly toxic cleaning agents used to control antibiotic resistant organisms like C. Difficile (NRGH);
- Inadequate labeling of controlled products and outdated or missing material safety data sheets (NRGH);
- No formal process to act on hazard reports (NRGH);
- No records of incident investigations (NRGH);
- No lockout procedures for a garbage compactor (NRGH);

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- Failure to maintain an occupational health and safety program (NRGH);
- Inadequate training of workers in safe work practices (NRGH);
- Failure to develop an adequate exposure control plan for workers who are exposed to materials contaminated with blood (CDH);
- Failure to assess risks of Musculoskeletal Injury (MSI) for workers from handling garbage, bio-hazardous materials, bio-garbage and laundry (CDH);
- Inadequate training of workers in dealing with spills of hazardous materials (CDH);
- Failure to provide investigation reports into causes of accidents causing injuries to workers that resulted in medical treatment (CDH), and
- Failure to set up a joint health and safety committee (CDH).

The orders identify the specific regulation contravened and outline the action required by Compass to comply with the order. The WCB also sets out a timeline for compliance, and in a number of instances the company has complied.

In other cases, the WCB reissued earlier orders which had not yet been complied with.

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*The orders can be found in electronic format attached to this release at [www.heu.org](http://www.heu.org).*

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