



October 5, 2020

**Attention all USW members over 55 working in primary manufacturing operations**

**Re: Bridging to Retirement Program**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Your Local Union and other Wood Council Locals have been asking government to include the Coastal Forest Industry sector into assistance programs that previously only included the Interior Forest Industry.

Those programs were of course necessary due to the number of mill closures the Interior industry faced in 2019 and 2020.

Our Local was not as hard hit, but USW Local 2009 in the Fraser Valley did experience two recent mill closures that increased the need for assistance on the Coast.

USW Local 2009 President Al Bieksa and the Wood Council Chair Jeff Bromley, had been pressing hard to get the Provincial Government to include the Coast, and with just days before the election was called, the government included the Coast in the Bridging to Retirement Program in order to assist those workers displaced as well as create openings for new employment in the sector.

There are still issues that Industry and Union officials are seeking answers on from government, but as this program is **limited to 200 applications**, we wanted to get the program details in your hands as soon as possible and encourage those who may consider the program to look at it closely.

The basics are that employees 55 or older in primary manufacturing operations who are affected by an indefinite shutdown, permanent closure or curtailment of at least 4 months, have the right to apply for the program. As do active members who want to voluntarily retire. There are different rules for both involuntary job losses and those that voluntarily want to leave employment.

The maximum an applicant can receive of \$75,000 (age 55) and a minimum of \$25,000 (age 65 plus). Note the amount drops \$5,000 per year to age 65 but those working at any age after the age of 65, are still eligible for \$25,000. Companies may be offering up to one year of benefit coverage as part of the package but the value of that benefit would be part of the total value of the bridging package.

You will note that voluntary applicants must provide written approval from your employer agreeing to your participation in the program before eligibility can be confirmed.

Please review the program at the following link:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/forestry/supports-for-forestry-workers/retirement-bridging-program>

If you have any questions not answered within the link please contact your Local Business Agent.

In solidarity,

Brian Butler  
President