



Toolkit for Climate and Labour Justice

What is the link between climate justice and labour justice?

Natural disasters such as rising temperatures, extreme flooding, and active wildfires disproportionately affect those in essential, low-wage positions, including workers in food service, retail, and hospitality. Between serving food on patios during wildfires, cooking in the back-of-house during a heatwave, or driving to deliver food during floods, food service workers are hit hard by climate change.

Through community-engaged research, our climate and labour project upholds the voices of workers across B.C. who have been directly affected by climate change in the food service industry. The project goal is to build worker power and foster connections among those who are otherwise isolated and unprotected.

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1. Climate Concerns for Workers

During extreme weather events, workers have expressed concerns about the following:

- Unsafe working conditions
- Termination for refusing unsafe work
- Interrupted transportation to commute to and from work
- Minimal training on evacuation procedures
- Reduced scheduled hours resulting in lost wages
- Workplace injuries and physical harm (fatigue, heat stress, fainting, etc.)
- Improper breaks for hydration and rest
- Exacerbated mental health struggles
- Inadequate legislation to protect workers



If these experiences resonate with you, we encourage you to start a climate conversation with your coworkers! See page 3 for more information on this.

2. Know Your Worker Rights

Stay in the know about your rights at work!

On our [website](#) you will find we have broken down *some* basic employment rights in the province, covering topics of:

- Getting paid
- Types of employment
- Scheduling, breaks, and leave
- Health and safety
- Temporary foreign worker rights
- Quitting and being fired
- Workplace justice
- 5 paid sick days
- Gender-based workplace violence

If your employer is breaking these rules **contact us at:**
info@workersolidarity.ca

During Extreme Weather Events You Have the Right to:

- Refuse unsafe work
- Raise concerns about air quality and temperature
- Be trained on emergency evacuation procedures
- Have potable water close to your workstation
- Take breaks if you work over five consecutive hours
- To wear clothing that will not expose you to heat stress or other hazards

3. Climate Conversations with Coworkers

Working during a natural disaster is precarious, and discussing your concerns with coworkers can feel risky while on the clock.

Here are some tips and tricks for starting climate conversations with coworkers:

Identify your Comrades

A great starting point to initiating climate action is by talking with coworkers and building solidarity! Gauging which coworkers to trust is important when having necessary (but sometimes tricky) conversations about climate struggles at work. Our comrades will be the coworkers who share an interest in bettering the workplace through collective action!

Ask General Questions

When the time feels right, consider asking your comrades some general questions. This is a good opportunity to understand where their climate concerns are at, how your experiences overlap, and ways you can work together moving forward. Something along the lines of: 1) “are you aware of an evacuation plan here?” 2) “did the wildfire smoke impact you at work last week?” 3) “has your commute to work ever been impacted by the heat?”

Build a List of Demands Together

Based on the conversations with comrades, build a list of demands together! Don’t know where to begin? Some suggestions include:

- Safe and fair working conditions
- Affordable and reliable public transportation
- Compensation for overtime



- Mandatory and additional breaks for hydration during shifts
- Knowledge of accessible mental health support
- Well-enforced regulations such as training on evacuation procedures, provision of PPE, and accessible cooling centres

Keep the Conversation Going

Find ways to bring other coworkers into the conversation and consider communicating outside of work to keep the conversation going!

Connect with WSN

It is important to actualize your demands! As such, [please reach out](#) if you have any questions or would like some support in facilitating these conversations.



4. Solidarity with Coworkers

Signs of Heat-Related Illnesses:

- Headache
- Confusion
- Dizziness
- High body temperature
- Heavy sweating
- Tiredness
- Nausea
- Muscle cramps
- Shallow breathing



Ways to Prevent Heat-Related Illnesses:

- Stay hydrated
- Wear sunscreen
- Monitor your body temperature
- Wear cooling packs around your neck
- Wear loose-fitting clothing

Check In On Your Coworkers!

- Initiate conversations with one another
- Ensure a buddy system when working
- Build a list of demands together

When workers have the tools to secure better employment conditions and safer working environments, this power can lead to structural and systemic changes beyond the workplace!

5. Climate Anxiety

Thank you to WSN member Anureet Kaur for the following information

The increasing frequency of heat domes, wildfires, and flash floods can cause fear and stress among individuals, especially when thinking about the future. These emotions are called “eco-anxiety”, referring to the mental distress associated with a deteriorating environment. Most importantly, these fears are valid.

What is Climate Anxiety?

Often individuals who care about environmental issues or those who feel more connected to their natural surroundings can be more susceptible to experiencing climate anxiety. Other terms such as *eco-anxiety*, *ecological grief*, *solastalgia*, and *eco-angst* are generally more accurate descriptors of the emotions felt by individuals. Ecological grief refers to the anticipatory grief experienced by individuals for losing their environment. Solastalgia is the distress experienced by individuals experiencing climate change while connected to their homes. Eco-angst is the despair felt by individuals at the state of the planet.

How does climate anxiety present itself?

Climate anxiety can persist in different ways, such as trouble sleeping, depression, feeling like you are losing control, interpersonal conflict, and continuous and frequent worry about the climate. For workers, eco-anxiety might present itself in unique ways. For example, fast food workers working in hot kitchens during extreme heat and food couriers cycling through floods might understand these conditions to be normal parts of the job.

How to take care of yourself?

Some ways to take care of yourself can look as simple as limiting our consumption of media, getting involved with local communities, and being out in nature. It is important to remember that you are not alone and that if you are experiencing climate change firsthand, chances are there is a community of people near you experiencing similar anxieties. Keeping conversations light and ending discussions on a hopeful note can be instrumental in providing levity and keeping your thoughts from spiralling into hopelessness.

Practicing self-care through journaling can be another great resource for coping. Journaling can include your thoughts on climate change, the stress you are experiencing and what you are worried about, but it can also include things you are grateful for. This is a great resource to document your relationship with nature to alleviate ecological grief. Lastly, talk about your feelings with others.

6. Become a WSN Member

Membership is open to all who support the work we do together, fighting to improve working conditions and advocating for precarious and non-unionized workers in BC.

Whether you know lots or little about BC's labour movement, have volunteered with us before or are new, or came to the Worker Solidarity Network because you were experiencing unfair working conditions and are now fired up to help others in the same boat as a member, you'll join a community committed to worker justice!

Visit <https://workersolidarity.ca/join/> to join the WSN membership

Here are some benefits of becoming a member:

- Access to free workshops and trainings (e.g. workers rights trainings, health & safety, how to unionize, and more)
- Access free community organizer trainings (e.g. media skills training, campaign and direct action trainings, political education, and more)
- Help getting stolen wages back through our Worker Solidarity Program
- Become part of the Network by volunteering on a campaign committee, or becoming a solidarity steward and helping people facing wage theft
- Bi-monthly membership newsletter
- Free entry to social events hosted by WSN
- Become a voting member and attend WSN member meetings
- Run for leadership positions on the Board of Director

Temperatures are rising but workers are, too!

Join the fight for:

- Job protection legislation
- Climate Justice is Labour Justice
- At least 15 paid sick days
- Full, permanent immigration #StatusforAll
- Acting in support of Indigenous sovereignty
- Protecting gratuities
- Supporting the decriminalization of sex work
- Ending racism, discrimination, and ableism in the workplace
- Supporting migrant worker's rights advocacy
- Closing the enforcement gap on employment standards
- Ending gender-based violence and sexual harassment at work
- Living wage



7. A Few Resources to Check Out!

Climate-Labour Legal Factsheet

<https://workersolidarity.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/FACT-SHEET-Climate-Change-Precarious-Employment.pdf>

Know Your Rights

<https://workersolidarity.ca/rights/>

Mental Health Videos

<https://workersolidarity.ca/mental-health-video/>

Report: Can't Stand the Heat? Get Out of the Kitchen

<https://workersolidarity.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Climate-and-Labour-Report-WSN-2023.pdf>

Unionizing 101

<https://workersolidarity.ca/rights/union101/>

WorkSafeBC

<https://www.worksafebc.com/en>