

Answers to members' questions concerning the NHU's proposed merger with the Union of Environment Workers

Since first announced on October 5, the National Office has received a number of questions from NHU members as to the process and benefits of the proposed merger with the UEW. We are pleased to provide answers to these queries below.

1. Why was this merger undertaken?

Simply put, there is strength in numbers. The NHU and the UEW are both modestly-sized Component unions under the umbrella of the Public Service Alliance of Canada. Regardless of the policies of the government of the day, our members face our employers' considerable resources and clout. A merged union will provide the staff and financial resources needed to meet the challenge of protecting our members' workplace rights.

2. Why was so little information available regarding the proposed merger?

In fact, information has been available on the NHU's Web site since we first announced the proposed merger on October 5. Additional information was added throughout that month – including a set of proposed by-laws that provided a highly-detailed view of the structure, governance and operation of the new UHEW. Beyond that, a dedicated Web page, with a highly visible link on our main page, was set up the first week of November to provide one location for all subsequent information on the proposed merger. All this information was available before Locals were asked to provide their feedback through Annual General Meetings.

3. So there's no 'hidden agenda'?

Just the 'open agenda' of building a stronger, more effective organization for the members of both unions. Our bargaining agent, the Public Service Alliance of Canada is both supportive and encouraging of this proposed merger. So are the national leadership bodies of both the NHU and UEW.

4. Who is mandating this merger?

Our members. The NHU-UEW merger was discussed at length by the national leadership of both our unions. On the NHU side, the proposed merger and suggested by-laws have been unanimously endorsed by all members of our National Council, who represent grassroots members across the country. All members are now being given a chance to mandate the proposed merger at NHU Local Annual General Meetings now underway.

5. *What if I can't attend the Annual General Meeting? Can I cast my vote in another fashion?*

Traditionally, decisions such as this have been taken by those members in good standing in attendance at a Local's AGM. Proxy or affidavit voting has never been used by the NHU.

6. *What does my Local have to gain from this merger?*

Regardless of size or location, every NHU Local stands to gain from this proposed merger. The increased size of the UHEW will bring greater respect from employers. Economies of scale mean that additional resources can be devoted to meeting the needs of *all* our Locals and their members. Increased financial stability, and greater income from the investment of dues income, means the new UHEW will be able, going forward, to provide a greater variety and depth of service for every member.

7. *Why does each NHU Local, regardless of size, have an equal weight when it comes to mandating the proposed merger? Is this fair?*

The NHU has always given our Locals equal voice when conducting such a process. All members stand to gain from this proposed merger. Of course, no one process can please everyone. However, our many smaller Locals would be denied any voice at all – effectively disenfranchises – if voting were conducted on the basis of the number of members per Local.

8. *Will there be a dues increase?*

No. Dues set by the new Union of Health and Environment Workers will be identical to current NHU dues. There will be no dues increase. In fact, once combined, the greater financial resources of the UHEW opens the possibility of future dues *decreases*.

9. *Will our existing NHU Local be forced to merge with UEW Locals?*

Not at all. The NHU's current Local structure will carry over into the newly-merged UHEW. There will be no reduction in the number of Locals on either side unless those Locals wish to explore this option. As always, Locals themselves will decide their future status.

10. *Is this in fact a merger of equals?*

Yes. Less than 400 members separate the membership sizes of the NHU and UEW. Together, we will have close to 10,000 members. Both unions also have similar membership profiles, resulting in common union cultures, workplace issues and servicing needs.

11. *What about staff resources?*

The two existing unions have an equal number of full-time officers and staff. The NHU and UEW each has a full-time National President located in Ottawa, an Executive Assistant to the President, two Service Officers, one Finance Officer and one administrative position. These respective positions will carry over into the newly-merged UHEW.

12. *Will NHU members still receive the same amount of servicing and support from the National Office?*

Absolutely. There will be no changes to the current NHU National Office staff after the proposed merger. Locals will continue to deal with the same familiar staff. And, thanks to the efficiencies created through merger, the UHEW also intends to create a new position of full-time staff Training Officer to provide even greater support and resources to Local officers and activists.

13. *Will the merger mean more work for Local executives?*

The merger is in fact an opportunity to have more members to support each other when mobilizing and to collaborate by sharing training opportunities and information. The intent is not to have Locals take on more workload. In fact, it is to provide more support for Local executive members.

14. *Who will represent members at the 3rd level of the grievance process?*

NHU Service Officers have always represented our members the 3rd level. UHEW Service Officers will continue to do so at the newly-merged union.

15. *Will the current Regional representation on the NHU National Council carry over to the newly-merged UHEW?*

As per the proposed by-laws available for viewing on the NHU Web site, the UHEW will merge the NHU and UEW National Councils until 2020. At that time, the UHEW's governing structure will be revisited. Until then, there will be a full-time National President and National Vice-President (one each from the NHU and the UEW) and 15 National Council members (Regional Vice-Presidents) from each of the following Regions:

- Alberta/ BC/Yukon (former NHU);
- BC/Yukon (former UEW);
- Saskatchewan (former NHU);
- Prairies/North (former UEW);
- Manitoba (former NHU);

- Ontario (former NHU);
- Ontario (former UEW);
- NCR (former NHU);
- NCR (former UEW);
- Quebec (former NHU),
- Quebec (former UEW);
- NB/PEI (former UEW);
- Scotia Fundy (former UEW);
- NL/Labrador (former UEW); and
- Atlantic (former NHU).

In addition, the current non-full-time National Vice-Presidents of the NHU and UEW will sit on the National Council until 2017.

16. *The NHU has more money in the bank than the UEW. Shouldn't we get to keep the extra ourselves?*

Both the NHU and the UEW are prudent with their members' dues money and have significant financial investments. In any merger, one party will always have more than the other. NHU members now pay very different levels of dues, depending on their classification. These monies do not belong to individual members; once rebated, they are used responsibly by our union for the benefit of all. We do not intend to begin a policy of exclusion. A new NHU member has always been treated the same as a long-standing member when it comes to union rights and services. Similarly, larger NHU Locals have always willingly supported smaller, less well-off Locals. This merger is about looking ahead and building a stronger and even more effective union for *everyone*.

17. *Why merge now, in the middle of collective bargaining by the PSAC?*

Bargaining and merger talks between PSAC Component unions are different processes, independent of each other. Our role and participation in the PSAC's negotiations with Treasury Board for a new collective agreement will not change.

18. *So, what's the 'bottom line' on the NHU-UEW merger?*

A stronger, financially sound, democratic union equipped to provide increased, effective representation to all our members. As always, we will follow the NHU's motto of *'putting members first!'*

19. *If I have other questions about the merger, who do I contact?*

Members are welcome to contact their NHU Local Executive, National Council Representative or the National President and National Vice President. Contact information for all these individuals is readily available on the NHU Web site.