



MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Tuesday April 20, 2021

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Uptown Shopping Centre May Be Left Without Sanitation After Janitors Vote To Strike

Janitors unionized with SEIU Local 2 have voted to strike at Uptown Shopping Centre in Victoria. Everclean janitors have been working with no paid sick days and low wages throughout the pandemic

VICTORIA, British Columbia, April 20, 2021 — Janitors working at Uptown Shopping Centre have voted to strike following nearly a year of their employer, Everclean Facility Services, refusing to provide a living wage to this newly unionized group of workers. Uptown shopping centre is one of the largest properties in Victoria, including retail, office, and recreational facilities. A strike by Uptown janitors would leave this widely-used public space with no sanitation staff.

The workers voted to unionize with SEIU Local 2 in June 2020 and have been fighting for a fair first collective agreement ever since. Worker demands for a fair wage and paid sick days have been thus far met with employer intransigence.

Lance Szpradowski is a janitor working for Everclean, tasked with cleaning at Uptown Mall's lobbies. He describes the increased workload of pandemic cleaning, saying: "If I had been cleaning the lobby prior to the pandemic, you'd clean the windows, vacuum carpet, mop the floor. But now we have to sanitise all of the touch surfaces, including door handles, elevators, crash bars, door frames. It's what is needed to keep mall visitors safe."

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Since the start of the pandemic, the janitors have been cleaning the expansive property of Uptown Shopping Centre, putting themselves at increased risk every day of contracting the COVID-19 virus. The workers are currently paid a base wage of only \$15.25/hour – barely above British Columbia’s minimum wage and an insufficient amount given the high living expenses in Victoria.

Hannah Clearwater, another night shift workers, says: “We are cleaners working in highly trafficked public spaces in the middle of the third wave, but we aren’t being treated like we’re essential by Everclean at all.”

Workers feel apprehensive about striking during the pandemic but say that the employer has left them no options. As Szpradowski describes: “We were already short-staffed prior to the pandemic. It’s gotten even worse after the pandemic started. There is so much work to do. But we haven’t seen any increase in hours or pay. Something has got to give.”

SEIU Local 2 represents workers in Nova Scotia, Ontario, Alberta, New Brunswick and British Columbia.

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