

SHOP STEWARDS: OUR FRONT LINE OF DEFENSE

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First off, if you are a Shop Steward reading this, THANK YOU! Shop Stewards are the Union's, and the Membership's, front line of defense. They are there daily on the workroom floor addressing our Membership's concerns, battling with management, and filing grievances. They receive very little compensation for what they do and very few thank you's.

Article 17 of the National Agreement covers Representation. Article 17.1 states "Stewards may be designated for the purpose of investigating, presenting and adjusting grievances." The selection and appointment of stewards is the sole and exclusive function of the Union. Language in Article IV Section 5A11 of our Uniform Local Union Constitution states the Local President "shall have the power to appoint, remove and supervise shop stewards." Article 17.2 covers Appointment of Stewards and provides a formula for how many Regular Stewards may be appointed in specific work location(s) on their tour. The greater the amount of employees, the greater the amount of Regular Stewards that could be appointed. For example, according to the formula, if there are between 100 to 199 employees in a tour/section then three (3) Regular Stewards may be appointed. There is no limit on Alternate Stewards. Article 17.3 covers the Rights of Stewards leaving his/her work area to investigate and adjust grievances, as well the Stewards right to information.

A Steward's right to information is also covered under Article 31 — Union-Management Cooperation. Article 31.3A states "The Employer will make available for inspection by the Union all relevant information necessary for collective bargaining or the enforcement, administration or interpretation of this Agreement, including information necessary to determine whether to file or to continue the processing of a grievance under this Agreement."

You, as a Handler, have a right to Union Representation. Whether a contractual question, asking for a grievance to be filed, or upon the possible expectation of discipline, you must be the one to exercise this right. A request to see a

Steward must be made to your supervisor. A Steward should be provided right away, but if one can't be provided right away then the Supervisor should explain why and when one will be provided. This delay should not exceed two hours. (Keep in mind that many Supervisors think they simply have 2 Hours to answer your request for a Steward.) That is absolutely NOT the case. You also have what are called Weingarten Rights, your right to Union Representation if a discussion with your supervisor could in any way lead to you being disciplined or terminated. Without a Union Representative present, you should not answer any of management's questions during an investigatory meeting. Again, as previously stated, this request for a Steward must come from YOU.

If a Steward is filing a grievance on your behalf, they must follow the time limits provided under Article 15 (Grievance-Arbitration Procedure). To start, it is important for Stewards & Mail Handlers to know that a Step 1 grievance must be filed with the employee's immediate supervisor within fourteen (14) days of the date on which the employee or the Union first learned or may reasonably have been expected to have learned of its cause. If denied at Step 1, the grievance may be moved to Step 2. If the grievance is denied at Step 2, the grievance may be moved to Step 3, and, if denied at Step 3, the grievance may be appealed to Arbitration, which is the final step. Each step has its own specific time limits. At Step 2 and beyond, while the Union owns the grievance, there should continue to be communication between the Union and the Grievant(s) along all steps of the grievance process.

Being a Shop Steward can be a very difficult job, but can also be very rewarding. I understand it is not for everyone, but take a minute and imagine your facility with no Stewards. What would management do? I'm sure you all see how frequently management violates the contract with good Union Representation, imagine what they would do with no Union Representation. Our contract wouldn't be worth the paper it's written on. To all Shop Stewards, Thank You!