April 4, 2017 |

Releases

BCFED demands answers from Clark government over small fine for safety violations that caused worker's death

Vancouver-The BC Federation of Labour is demanding answers from Premier Clark's labour minister, Shirley Bond, about a paltry fine assessed against a big Vancouver property development firm whose serious violation of health and safety rules caused the death of a Kamloops construction worker in 2015.

Sean Alexander Donetz was killed on the job after falling from a lifting device at a Kamloops construction site. The Workers' Compensation Board investigated the tragic accident and found Donetz's death was caused by a "high risk and repeated violation," by his employer, a subsidiary of Vancouver-based Onni Group of Companies. Onni makes significant donations to the BC Liberal Party.

Despite the seriousness of the violations that caused the death, Onni was fined only $48,719.50.

"Such a paltry fine for a safety violation that cost a worker his life sends a message to employers that they don't have to follow the rules," says BCFED President Irene Lanzinger. "It says employers can kill or injure workers with impunity, or at worst a small fine and a slap on the wrist. It's unacceptable."

In a letter sent to the labour minister yesterday, Lanzinger asked Bond to explain why the WCB assessed such a small penalty to a company with such deep pockets.

“And given the WCB’s findings, the bigger question I’ve asked the minister to explain is why a criminal prosecution was not pursued against Onni for negligence causing death?” Lanzinger says. “We want to know why aren’t Onni executives facing jail time?”

Six months ago, a BC court let another employer off the hook in a workplace tragedy where 22-year-old Kelsey Ann Kristian died when she was crushed by a 31,000-kg heavy duty truck that she was operating without any training at a quarry near Mission. Her employer faced criminal negligence charges and jail time. But the courts let the boss off with a fine instead.

“These are both clear examples of why government needs to do more to make employers face real consequences—including jail time—when their negligence and failure to keep workers safe on the job results in injury or death.”

The BCFED’s letter to Bond also took the Clark government to task for over its plan to appropriate the WCB’s budget surplus as a gift to employers. Lanzinger says the money—which could amount to hundreds of millions of dollars—should be used to fund workplace safety programs, tougher rules, greater enforcement, more criminal prosecutions of negligent employers, and improved benefits for injured workers.