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## **Evergreen Forestry firefighters battled Fort Providence inferno without a contract or wage parity, employer claims they are not essential workers**

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**FORT PROVIDENCE, NT** – As flames threatened the Hamlet of Fort Providence this summer, a group of Indigenous wildland firefighters, working without a collective agreement for a second straight wildfire season, put their lives on the line to protect families and communities.

These workers employed by Evergreen Forestry – operated by the Deh Gáh Got'ıę First Nation and the Kátł'odeeche First Nation under contract with the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) - have been battling blazes alongside GNWT firefighters while being denied the same wages for the same work.

Despite repeated calls from the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) North Region and its component, the Union of Northern Workers (UNW), to renew the collective agreement that expired in December 2023, the employer has devoted their efforts to stalling serious negotiations.

In the last round of collective bargaining, PSAC/UNW secured wage parity with GNWT rates. Now, as these highly trained, essential emergency responders are once again on the front lines, their employer is demanding monetary concessions from Evergreen firefighters, insisting they don't deserve a wage increase through 2026.

"Our members are fighting to keep communities from burning to the ground, under the same dangerous conditions as GNWT wildland firefighters," said PSAC North Regional Executive Vice-President Josée-Anne Spirito. "The employer's three-year wage freeze is not only disrespectful, it's dangerous."

While mediation efforts failed to close the gap between parties, the employer finally agreed in August - under pressure during hearings before the Canada Industrial Relations Board - to send the dispute to binding arbitration.

Still, with no dates set, arbitration is unlikely to begin until 2026, two years after the union served notice to bargain.

The employer also continues to argue that Evergreen firefighters are not essential service workers, defined by the Government of Canada as workers providing services "necessary for the safety and security of the public."

"These firefighters aren't just doing a job, they are heroes protecting their home communities from these wildfires," said Gayla Thunstrom, UNW President. "The employer needs to step up and recognize these workers' value and essential role."

PSAC North and UNW call on Evergreen Forestry to resume good faith negotiations or finalize arbitration arrangements without further delay.

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*PSAC North is Canada's largest union north of 60, representing more than 20,000 members in the Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut. We support members in achieving better pay, safe working conditions, employment security, fair treatment, and respect in the workplace. Our members work for various employers, including federal, territorial, and municipal governments, non-profit organizations, and the private sector. UNW is a component of PSAC.*