

With safety at the forefront, a closer return to normal is on the horizon for construction industry in Hamilton Niagara region

Unionized contractors demonstrated strong perseverance in 2020 despite facing many unknowns

March 4, 2021 (Hamilton, ON) – Mechanical contractors working in and around **Hamilton and Niagara**, as well as **Halton, Brant, Haldimand and Norfolk Counties**, will see hours approach close to normal levels this year. The Mechanical Contractors Association of Hamilton Niagara (MCAHN) is forecasting a return to almost 80% of pre-COVID hours in 2021 following an inevitable slowdown in 2020.

According to MCAHN, its membership experienced a reduction in working hours to approximately 65% of regular levels in 2020. This was largely due to projects that were delayed or halted as the industry tried to navigate the unknown, including whether construction was deemed essential and what new protocols were required to protect the health and safety of contractors and all their workers.

Despite the fears at the start of pandemic and an influx of rapidly changing guidelines, contractors and companies adapted quickly.



Left to Right: Modern Niagara Piping General Foreman, Jeff Hill; MCAHN President, Greg Crawford; and Modern Niagara project manager, Mitch Dupont, stand outside the Pandemic Response Unit at Joseph Brant Hospital, which was designed and built during the early stages of the pandemic with health and safety at the forefront.

“As an organization that represents unionized mechanical contractors in the Hamilton Niagara region, it has always been important for us to be at the forefront of health and safety, in any circumstance,” says Greg Crawford, President of MCAHN and Pursuit Manager at ES Fox Limited. “While the pandemic put us all in an unprecedented situation, our members were already well-positioned to adapt to new and changing health and safety guidelines relatively quickly.”

In addition to mandatory Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and maintaining a safe, six-foot distance from coworkers, protocols were put in place that drastically changed the way contractors work. This included a movement away from “stacking of trades”, where contractors across various specialties work together in one small space, additional trailer facilities to provide social distancing and new guidelines regarding physical distancing in a pick-up truck.

Many companies in the ICI construction sector also increased sanitization measures for contractors on site. This included more frequent cleaning of bathrooms and shared areas, hand sanitizer at various touch points, increasing access to sanitization wipes in lunch areas, and wiping down tools on a regular basis. Many also set up internal COVID task forces to help manage the changing requirements of clients and unions, while adhering to government mandates.



Greg Crawford, Mitch Dupont and Jeff Hill discuss health and safety protocols that were put in place for mechanical contractors during the build, which was completed in a record time of two weeks.

MCAHN’s industry outlook for 2021 comes on the heels of a recently released [study](#) led by the Institute for Work at Health, which found that unionized construction sites in Ontario’s ICI construction sector are 31% safer when compared to non-unionized sites. The study measured safety based on lost time injury claims to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board

(WSIB). For unionized trade workers, incidences that led to time-off work were significantly less than for unrepresented trade workers.

“For the unionized construction sector, communication, education and safety are engrained in our culture. This, coupled with the high standards our Owner Clients place on safety, put us at an advantage to manage the rapidly changing health and safety requirements brought on by the pandemic. We made it through extraordinary circumstances in 2020 and now we are looking at a positive economic recovery for 2021,” says Crawford.

“While it is crucial to implement new policies in response to health and safety challenges, the responsibility at the end of the day comes down to the workers following new regulations to protect one another on-site,” says Nathan Bergstrand, Business Manager at United Association Local 67 Hamilton Niagara. “I am proud of our how our members adapted and quickly took the necessary steps to keep fellow peers and tradesmen safe during the pandemic.”

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For more information, or to coordinate interviews and photography, please contact:

Wanda Heimbecker
Association Manager, Mechanical Contractors Association Hamilton Niagara
Tel: 905.522.1965
E: manager@mcahamiltonniagara.org

About Mechanical Contractors Association of Hamilton Niagara

The Mechanical Contractors Association of Hamilton Niagara (MCAHN) is an accredited bargaining agency with the Ontario Labour Relations Board and represents all Unionized Mechanical Contractors working in the Hamilton and Niagara region, as well as Brant, Haldimand and Norfolk Counties.

MCAHN is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1966 and provides union management coordination and representation, joint apprenticeship administration, education programs, scholarships, government liaison, community support, networking opportunity and conference sponsorships.

About United Association Local 67 Hamilton Niagara

Founded in 1899 in Hamilton, Ontario, The United Association Local 67 is part of the of the United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipe Fitting Industry of the United States and Canada or "UA". They are a multi-craft union whose members are engaged in the fabrication, installation and servicing of piping systems. There are approximately 326,000 highly skilled United Association members who belong to over 300 individual local unions across North America.

The UA Local 67 has been training qualified pipe tradesmen longer than anyone else in the industry. The UA boasts the premier training programs available in the industry today, including five-year apprenticeship programs, extensive journeyman training, organized instructor training, and certification programs.