

LABOUR

# High workers' compensation premiums to be discussed

By Cory Hubley

TRANSCONTINENTAL MEDIA—CORNER BROOK

Having the highest workers' compensation insurance premiums in the country is not just the problem of employers.

Newfoundland and Labrador Employers' Council executive director Richard Alexander says it should be a concern for everybody in the province.

Unfortunately, he said, the lack of awareness is one of the obstacles in bringing about a change to a system which costs approximately 37 per cent higher in Newfoundland and Labrador than the nation's average.

"People are under the assumption we have a lot of injuries in this province," Alexander said Tuesday in Corner Brook, where he will be meeting with members of the business community today. "That is far from the truth. Over the last 20 years, we have seen 174 per cent reduction in injuries. We are one of the safest provinces to work in in Canada.

"That is the result of employers putting millions of dollars into the system to prevent injuries. But even with that remarkable reduction in injuries, we are still the most expensive system in Canada."

The meeting is part of a series of sessions being held across the province for the employers' council to collect opinions and information from employers to shape their position for the ongoing review of the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Commission.

The council is pushing to bring the cost of the system in line with the Canadian average, and securing its financial sustainability.

Alexander said this province's system covers approximately 98 per cent of its workforce, which he said is a positive thing.

"We don't want to cut benefits for



Richard Alexander

workers, but we do want a legislated structure that ensures every dollar that goes into the system is used in the most efficient and prudent manner," he said. "We think there are ways the commission can do that to minimize some of this huge negative economic impact we are seeing in some of these places."

The executive director said with employers paying the highest workers' compensation insurance premiums in the country, that has a trickle-down effect on employees' wages, hours of work, and the number of people hired. He said there are sometimes effects on the competitiveness of employers too.

Business owners and representatives are frustrated and angry to be constantly paying such high premiums, according to Alexander. Also, many people are unaware of the situation and/or its effects.

"We are not asking to be the best in the country, we are just asking to put a structure in place that takes us out of last place," he said. "Is it too much to ask to move our province out of last place after almost two decades?"

Local employers were asked to register for the closed sessions. Between 25-30 businesses were registered for today's session.

The Western Star