



Update - Mandatory OT in New Reduction

The Union Hall has been flooded with calls in recent weeks regarding the company's usage of mandatory overtime in the new reduction area. The APP had been subjected to the same situation earlier this year.

Your union leadership have been working hard at all levels, including the utilization of all legal avenues, to find a resolution to this unacceptable situation.

Clearly, there are a number of factors which have resulted in this situation causing members in the new lines to feel overworked, pressured and extremely frustrated.

These factors include training time, production ramp-up (pot start-up), falling behind in anode exchange and tapping and work organization issues.

Many members have communicated that while they are trying their best, keeping up with production demands has been extremely challenging. Even the most proficient operators from the old lines are finding it difficult to get up to speed in the new lines, which is completely understandable considering the increased complexity in the new operations.

In addition to this, lack of equipment reliability and breakdowns pose further problems. This is by no means a fault of our maintenance crews; it is a reality of on-going commissioning.

This issue has been further exacerbated by the increased ramp-up in production. The Union has pressed management to slow down or delay further pot start up in order to allow operators reasonable time to improve their skills, confidence and efficiency.

While the company is eager to make a return on its investment, the continued ramp-up in production has resulted in conditions, to use their terminology, that have become "critical".

So, even having a large number of contractors in the area to assist in start-up has not resulted in getting all of the work done.

In response to this apparent critical condition, management has been requiring members to work mandatory overtime to continue tapping or anode exchanges until a next shift relief arrives – this, we are told, is in order to maximize crane running time in order to meet production and pot maintenance needs.

WorkSafe regulations are clear that a pre-use inspection must be done at the beginning of every shift.

The Union expects that voluntary overtime be offered in order to catch up on production activities, such as asking if anyone wants to stay late, come in early or work an additional shift on their days off. Overtime should be voluntary, not imposed on our members, and in no case should mandatory OT be used to perform non-critical tasks, such as housekeeping.

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Through all of this, many members in the new lines have made it very clear that despite many of the challenges in meeting production demands the use of overtime may not even be necessary if work flow, organization and co-ordination improvement opportunities were explored, with worker input, and implemented.

This is not a recent revelation by the members, as these observations had been made shortly after start-up. Members have expressed that while they are making every effort to “get the job done” safely and efficiently, there are often disruptions throughout the shift such as task changes or co-activity issues causing delays in completing work.

The cascading effect of these disruptions is that as the area falls behind in activities such as tapping and anode exchange further process problems arise as other activities, such as anode cover and pot tending, fall behind also.

Area management has informed the Union that if shift production needs are being met there would not be the need for anyone to stay late.

To this end, the Union and the company have agreed a workshop will be conducted, with representation from every shift, in order to find ways to improve overall work organization. The objective is to look at ways to better organize work flow, manage co-activity and eliminate bottlenecks which either interfere with completing tasks or require a changing of tasks.

The desired outcome should be obvious: To eliminate mandatory overtime and to ensure smooth running shifts, which reduces frustration and work-cycle issues, thereby improving the overall health, safety and efficiency of operations.

This exercise isn't about getting more out of people who are already working hard; it's about getting more out of the operation and reducing the demand on people. In short, the goal is to make our jobs easier, not harder.

Throughout training and real-life work experience the membership understands that the new pre-bake technology is far less forgiving than the old soderberg technology and that the new pots are much more sensitive to process upsets.

No one was under any illusions that start-up was going to be anything but a challenging time, particularly as training and competency levels compete with increased production requirements, workforce levels, commissioning and maintenance problems and logistical issues such as work organization. However, few could have anticipated how great these challenges would turn out to be.

While the results of the workshop are yet to be determined, we are confident that this opportunity, which members have been asking for, will produce solutions that will benefit the working lives of the members in the area, providing the company is willing to implement them.

The membership will be kept up to date on any developments.