

Shop Stewards

FROM THE “Did You Know?” EMAIL SERIES PROVIDED BY THE NOVA SCOTIA UNION OF PUBLIC & PRIVATE EMPLOYEES

Need a shop steward? Here are some things you should know:

1. Most collective agreements contain clauses that entitle you to a shop steward if you are going to be disciplined or if there is an investigation that will likely lead to discipline. You may not be entitled to a shop steward in other circumstances (like a performance appraisal) but if it would make you feel more comfortable, it never hurts to ask your supervisor if you can bring one in.
2. Shop stewards are volunteers appointed by the Union, not the Employer. The Union tries to ensure that its shop stewards are trained to deal with various circumstances.
3. Never waive your right to a shop steward. A steward will often be able to remember things or have notes from a meeting that will be useful if a grievance or arbitration becomes necessary.
4. You don't have to use the shop steward who works in your department. You can choose any shop steward from your Local who agrees to represent you even if it means bringing in a shop steward from another work location. If a manager says that she has already arranged union representation for you, call the Union. In some cases, the manager's actions may constitute interference in the administration of a trade union, which is a violation of the provincial Trade Union Act.
5. An employer is usually required to give you reasonable time to arrange for a shop steward to be present. What's reasonable will depend on the circumstances, including the urgency of the meeting and the availability of the shop steward of your choice.
6. The role of a shop steward at a meeting depends on the particular circumstances. Stewards may simply observe to make sure you are treated fairly, take notes so that there is a record of what happened and/or act as an advocate, asking questions and putting your position forward.

NOTE: The “Did You Know?” series is general information only. For advice specific to your workplace or personal circumstances, please contact a union representative. Comments are welcome at nsupe@ns.sympatico.ca