

Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority

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New Landmark Contract with Carpenters Union Reduces Costs for McCormick Place Exhibitors

Contract seen as another milestone in maintaining Chicago's leadership in convention and trade show industry

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CHICAGO – The Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority (MPEA), major trade show contractors and the union representing the largest single group of workers on the trade show floor today announced a new collective bargaining agreement designed to further reduce costs for McCormick Place exhibitors and provide them with greater operational flexibility.

A key feature of the new contract with the Chicago & Northeast Illinois District Council of Carpenters reduces costs for exhibitors by expanding the window of straight time wages for carpenters who set-up and dismantle exhibits. Show contractors expect that it will aid in the reduction of associated costs on the day the show breaks, resulting in savings to exhibitors.

The contract, which took effect June 1, also requires random drug and alcohol testing of union members to help ensure a safe and harmonious working environment at McCormick Place.

The Carpenters are the fourth major union representing McCormick Place workers to negotiate new, more flexible work rules over the past two years, following riggers, decorators and electricians.

“We commend the Carpenters Union and the major show contractors for working collaboratively to ensure that Chicago remains a leading choice for conventions, trade shows and conferences,” said Juan A. Ochoa, CEO of the MPEA. “This agreement is yet another step in the ongoing enhancement of the customer experience at McCormick Place.”

MPEA Chairman Ted Tetzlaff said the new contract comes at an opportune time.

"The timing of these changes provides additional, tangible reasons to choose Chicago, as it competes to fill the New West Building with association and corporate business," Tetzlaff said. "Labor continues to be a very special and important partner to the MPEA as we strive to exceed our customers' expectations. Greater flexibility, lower costs and an experienced, efficient workforce help us position Chicago and McCormick Place as a global destination to do business."

"We recognize the importance of the convention and trade show industry to Chicago, and that is why we were willing to make changes that will lower costs and provide greater flexibility for exhibitors," said Frank Libby, 2nd Vice President of the Carpenters Union. "We believe the changes we agreed to will help attract more shows, and lead to more work for our members."

The union represents approximately 40 percent of the workforce at any given show, and the new agreement could apply to roughly 1,000 carpenters working on major shows. The carpenters set-up and dismantle exhibits and lay carpeting.

The final agreement was negotiated between the union and the two major contractors that stage shows at McCormick Place – Freeman and GES Exposition Services. This direct negotiation marked a significant departure from the past, when show contractors had to abide by regional agreements between the union and the Mid-American Regional Bargaining Association (M.A.R.B.A.)

"The regional bargaining process simply was not reflecting the very specialized kind of work that goes on at McCormick Place. We appreciate the willingness of the Carpenters Union to join us at the bargaining table to negotiate agreements based on what makes sense for the convention and trade show industry," said Doug Van Ort, senior vice president for Freeman.

Key components of the new two-year contract include the following:

- At break of show, Monday through Friday, work will be paid at straight time rates from 4:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Previously, work performed during this time period was billed at time-and-a-half overtime rates.

- The window of time for time-and-a-half rates on Saturdays has been expanded from 8 to 12 hours, eliminating four hours of what had been double overtime rates.
- This agreement allows employers to randomly drug and alcohol test their employees.
- The agreement brings the Carpenters Union into conformance with agreements previously negotiated with unions representing riggers, decorators and electricians -- the other trade workers who help set-up and dismantle exhibits.

"This uniformity is a crucial aspect of the new collective bargaining agreement," said John Patroski, executive vice president of GES. "It means exhibitors not only will reduce costs, but will be able to budget more accurately. The change to straight time at the 'break' of the show now aligns with all the trades for the benefit of the industry and the Chicago economy."

Freeman's Van Ort cited the random drug and alcohol testing as an important component of the agreement.

"Random drug and alcohol testing helps create a safe workplace – for the workforce, for exhibitors and for everybody in the hall. It's especially good news that the Carpenter's Union has joined several of our other trades in accepting this important feature in this collective bargaining agreement," said Van Ort.

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