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IWGB Couriers & Logistics Branch COVID-19 Demands for the Industry

The IWGB Couriers and Logistics branch calls for greater safety measures to be put in place and increased financial security for all couriers during the current world health crisis. More concerted actions need to be taken to not only guarantee the well-being of couriers, but also the health and safety of the wider society. The Covid19 crisis has highlighted the ample failings in the courier industry. These need to be addressed immediately to not only guarantee the physical and financial security of couriers providing a vital service during the crisis, but also to stabilise the industry going forwards.

As the crisis worsens, the role of couriers will become increasingly more important and we expect all companies to acknowledge this by complying to these basic demands. It is our responsibility to simultaneously do what we can to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 while accommodating society while it is in desperate need. Employers have a duty of care towards couriers and the wider members of the public so we demand they do the right thing.

1. Full pay for self isolation

At the moment the sick pay on offer is simply not enough to compensate a courier for having to self-isolate. The lack of full pay for couriers could accelerate the spread of the virus. With little to nothing currently on offer, couriers are being put in a position where they do not have a choice but to work through potential early symptoms in the hope of it not being Covid-19. Couriers come into contact with hundreds of people while they deliver or pick up packages, food and specimens, and it is therefore a matter of social responsibility and public health that employers take actions to avoid this health crisis getting any worse.

It is irresponsible to ask a courier to self-isolate when offering little to no money to maintain themselves or their family. Employers should not put this burden on a precarious worker and employers should relieve them of this stress and offer full pay so responsible action can be taken. Self-isolation should not be a privilege for only those who can afford to take it. To prevent the spread of the virus and protect the community, everyone should be able to choose to self-isolate, without fear, should they become unwell or are exposed to somebody who has developed symptoms of COVID-19. The current situation could undermine all the actions of those working from home and self-isolation and unless everyone is able to take responsible action, everyone remains at risk.

We also demand high risk couriers (those with pre-existing health conditions and those over 60 years old) or those couriers who live with high risk people, to self isolate for 12 weeks and receive full pay. Failure to do that could mean that those workers and their families are exposed to life threatening risks.

2. Regular testing for coronavirus

Couriers are in contact with hundreds of people everyday. A lot of these people will be considered high risk. As medical couriers we collect from hospitals, old peoples homes and places in which there is a high concentration of high risk people. As food delivery couriers we deliver to people who are self isolating due to illness or due to being high risk and not wanting to be exposed to the potential risk of infection. As conventional couriers we will also deliver to the same high risk and self isolating members of the public. For this reason it is essential for couriers to be tested on a regular basis to make sure we are not unknowingly spreading the virus in places it could be fatal.

3. Enhanced pay during reduced workforce/probable lockdown

As the virus spreads and more people self-isolate, the workforce is likely to decrease, and the demand is likely to increase. Couriers are going to be paramount to the tackling of this virus, to monitoring the spread and to delivering supplies to the public while they are self isolating. When everyone is being told to stay at home and keep safe, couriers will be out delivering and exposed to the risks others are able to avoid.

Couriers should be compensated for this and their pay should also reflect the important role they are playing during a time of crisis. The general public will be told to stay at home and only leave for the most unavoidable reasons, but the job we are doing is fundamental during this time and so we will continue to work and be more exposed to the virus. Couriers should not have to shoulder this additional burden for free while the company profits.

4. Temporary leave payment to be funded by the company when needed

We are heading into a time where demand is uncertain and could ultimately result in business having to close short term. Couriers should still be paid if this happens. They still have bills to pay, families to feed and various other overheads and employers have a responsibility to these workers. They should be paid for this time and as soon as business picks up again, they can return to work.

5. Social distancing to be put in place wherever possible

We need to minimise the amount of time spent in crowded places or interacting with other people in general. Specimens should be left near entrances or as close to entrances as possible. Food delivery couriers should be given the option to leave food outside customer addresses. This is already an option for customers and riders should be given the same choice. Wherever possible, deliveries should be brought out to the rider rather than them having to enter restaurants. For conventional couriers, packages should be brought to them outside offices/residences and then dropped outside as well.

6. Safety equipment available for riders

Companies should be offering couriers the equipment that makes them feel safe working while the coronavirus spreads. You should offer:

- Hand sanitizer that can be refilled when empty
- Protective gloves
- Protective masks
- Full body protective outfit

Couriers may not choose to take up the offer of this equipment, however, you are responsible for their wellbeing and should therefore offer what they want to make them feel at ease while working. It is a small cost to pay for couriers continuing to work and keep the business going in the most adverse conditions.

7. Communication

We request that companies send daily updates to couriers to adequately keep them informed with this rapidly changing situation. Information should be available in other languages such as Portuguese as English is not the first language of many of your riders. A helpline should be set up for those that have difficulty with email and/or written communication. Communication of information is paramount to courier's well being and so far there has not been enough of it.

8. A halt to terminations from the Platform

At a time of such uncertainty, additional strain should not be put on couriers who will be worried about financially providing for themselves and family. It is clear that employers will also be stretched and not have adequate time and resources to investigate customer and restaurant complaints which could lead to riders being unfairly terminated. We are calling on companies to put a halt on terminations during this period.

9. Government to guarantee basic pay and conditions

If the event that the government chooses to utilise and subsidise the courier industry to cater for increased demand, we risk the government being complicit in the exploitation of couriers through bogus employment status that we have been fighting against. We expect a minimum standards guarantee (real living wage plus costs, holiday pay and sick pay etc). We expect the high demand to mean that couriers will make more than this minimum guarantee however, and there must be a safety net in place to avoid the exploitation of couriers working in a high risk environment and performing a vital service to society.

10. Guarantee the real living wage plus costs during times of low demand

As couriers we are fortunate to work in an industry that shows hope of continuation in some form throughout the Covid-19 health crisis. Courier's delivering vital specimens, food and supplies is fundamental during this time and we demand that couriers are guaranteed at least a minimum wage of the real living wage after costs during times of low demand. Couriers will be outdoors and exposed to risks while millions of people will be staying at home to stay safe and we expect this sacrifice to be met with a minimum wage guarantee even during times of low demand. Companies need couriers available at all times and demand will inevitably pick up, therefore, couriers should be assured they will be making at least the real living wage while they are providing an invaluable service.