

TO: All MUNFA Members

FROM: The MUNFA Executive Committee

DATE: February 4, 2008

SUBJECT: CLASSROOM SEATING CAPACITY AND FIRE REGULATIONS

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In September 2005, upon request from concerned ASMs, MUNFA wrote to the Manager, Safety and Environmental Services, Facilities Management, requesting information about the relationship between the maximum seating capacity of classrooms and fire regulations at Memorial University. The MUNFA Executive was concerned to learn only in December 2005, despite repeated reminders, that such information could not be readily made available. MUNFA did receive an old, incomplete database of "Occupant Load Capacity" for rooms at the St. John's campus, but our requests for an updated database, which would include all classrooms currently in use, has yet to meet with success despite 28 months of action on our part.

The MUNFA Executive also approached the Fire Prevention Office of the St. John's Regional Fire Department in September 2005 to see if it might also be able to provide us with information. To our surprise, we learned that the Life Safety Code and the National Building Code do not provide that Memorial University be considered an educational institution for purposes of requiring the assignment of maximum seating capacity. The code instead considers the university to be a business in which only rooms used to host public events are subject to maximum capacity orders.

The situation is very different at the Sir Wilfred Grenfell College (SWGC) campus, which provided the requested information about classroom seating capacity. We further received confirmation that the SWGC administration calculates maximum capacities for rooms in accordance with the guidelines established by the Life Safety Code and the National Building Code.

While our repeated requests to Facilities Management in St. John's have resulted in additional information, we have yet to receive evidence that the university has a comprehensive and current plan for classroom and laboratory use complete with maximum capacity orders that follow the guidelines established by the Life Safety Code and the National Building Code. The MUNFA Executive is particularly concerned to learn that rooms originally designated as laboratories, which should differ in their maximum occupancy, may now be serving as classrooms.

The MUNFA Executive wishes to assure ASMs, particularly those who have contacted us with concerns about overcrowding in their classrooms, that we will continue to pursue this matter. We would appreciate hearing from ASMs if they have any concerns about the safety and/or occupancy of classrooms and/or laboratories.