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Houston Today

# USW makes tentative agreement with Canfor

By [Rikki Schierer - Houston Today](#)

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After three months of negotiation, Canadian Forest Products (Canfor) and the United Steelworkers union (USW) have reached a tentative contract agreement that both parties are supporting.

The USW contract with Canfor, West Fraser, and Conifer mills came to an end in June 2009, with negotiations between the USW and Conifer proceeding shortly thereafter. However, after Conifer stepped away from the table in October 2009, ceasing negotiations, the USW approached Canfor to begin another round of negotiations, and last Saturday a tentative contract was struck up.

“What you saw here was with these negotiations was we had some very productive talks, created a temporary agreement, we can’t lose sight of that, obviously the membership has to vote on it, but both the USW and Canfor really approached these negotiations in a unique and innovative way,” Dave Lefebvre with Canfor public relations said. “We really looked for solutions instead of looking at the problems.”

This approach did work, he said, with several

innovative solutions found.

Issues that the plan encompasses includes issues such as seniority, severance, and issues around partial closures he said, however right now Canfor isn't going into detail around specifics.

"We really want our employees to hear it from the union ... that our employees are fully educated about it," Lefebvre said. "But we're obviously happy with the contents of the agreement."

In an online video, USW Wood Council Chair Bob Matters, the chief spokesperson for the B.C. Interior Bargaining Committee Bob Matters spoke of the four year agreement, which will be valid, should the membership vote it in, until June 2013.

"This is a good agreement," Matters said. "It is a good agreement for our members, for Canfor, and for the industry and will help on this road to recovery."

This agreement will include unprecedented seniority protection, better severance pay (including severance pay for interim layoffs), as well as a two per cent wage increase in years three and four, Matters said.

"This [wage increase] will ensure our members continue to receive top wages in the industry," he said.

USW 1-424 President Frank Everitt said that he was pleased with the agreement on behalf of the membership, agreeing that it was good for everyone involved, and urged the membership to vote yes on the new contract, with the vote expected in this week.

Should the membership approve the contract, the USW will be taking this agreement to West Fraser and Conifer, Everitt said, whose agreements will mirror Canfor's. It's generally

a rule that the first agreement sets the stage for negotiations to follow, Everitt said.

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