



Solidarity Today!

Informing the Members of USW Local 237 at the RockTenn Tacoma Mill
July 29, 2014

USW Local 237 Attends RockTenn Council

On July 25th, representatives from USW Local 237 gathered in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, at USW headquarters, with other union representatives from other RockTenn mills and plants. These union activists were there to hear a presentation by USW Vice President Jon Geenen (Jon heads the paper bargaining unit at USW HQ). The nature of the presentation was whether it would make sense to pursue a master agreement with RockTenn.

A master agreement would be an agreement that would define the general wage increases (GWI), healthcare, pensions and possibly other items that are normal parts of the bargaining process. Such a master agreement would ease the negotiating process for locals by dealing with the issues that are largely dictated by industry standards, allowing locals to bargain on items that are of a more local nature, more peculiar to their members. Companies that are already part of master bargaining agreements include International Paper, Georgia-Pacific, PCA, Domtar, Boise and others. These companies have thousands of employees that are successfully represented by hundreds of USW locals, including many of the major mills on the west coast.

Jon Geenen, and the Chairman of the USW RockTenn Council, District 9 Director Dan Flippo, told us that the USW has already had some preliminary talks with RockTenn and that they're finding some interest in pursuing a master agreement. Nothing has been set in stone, but with the budding interest shown by RockTenn, the USW wanted to present to the RockTenn Council with their thoughts on the matter. Hence the call for a meeting of the RockTenn Council (which we are now a part of here in Tacoma).

With the consolidation occurring in the pulp and paper industry, negotiations have been one of holding off concessions as long as possible. Companies such as RockTenn have been praying on weaker locals, extracting concessions, and using these concessions as base line negotiations to take to subsequent local bargaining. Once they establish a pattern, it becomes more and more difficult for individual local bargaining units to resist these demands that erode our benefits. These concessions take the form of low GWI's, reduced pension and healthcare benefits, loss of vacation and other items that we tend to take for granted, expecting them to be there for us when we need them. With the nature of many local union members to pay little attention to negotiations until they are "on their doorstep", these concessions creep up on us until there is no one left to fight. A master agreement staves off this "disconnect", protecting the basic rights of USW members when their minds are on other things.

Of course, the question then becomes one of why would RockTenn be interested in giving up what seems to be to their advantage? The answer lies in the fact that local bargaining does not always go as they plan either. There is value to them, and their shareholders, to have stability and predictability in contract negotiations. A master agreement is not going get us everything that we want, but neither is it going to give RockTenn all that they want – it's going to be a compromise derived from the combined strength of the thousands of USW members working in RockTenn mills. A master agreement will help us restore the balance of power that of late has shifted to the company's advantage, helping us now, and helping those who following in our footsteps.

We will be discussing the possibility of a master agreement in more detail at USW Local 237's August 11th union meeting. We encourage you to attend and share your thoughts and concerns. Keep in mind, though, that it will require a majority vote of the members represented by the USW RockTenn Council to approve moving forward on any agreement. Attending your local union meetings will go a long way in allowing you to cast an informed vote, if and when such an agreement is reached.

USW Proposes entering into a master agreement with RockTenn.

"RockTenn prays on weak locals"

"Protecting Member Rights"

"Decent Wage Adjustments"

"Protecting Medical"

"Increases to AD&D Insurance"

"Increases to pension"

"Restoring the balance of Power"

Come to the Local 237 Union Meeting on August 11th, 2014 at 4:30pm for more Details on what a Master Agreement will mean to us.

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