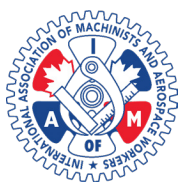




# Understanding Picket Lines



International Association of Machinists  
and Aerospace Workers - IAM

[iamaw.ca](http://iamaw.ca)



## Understanding Picket Lines

***Your decision is a matter of ethics and loyalty.***

Honouring a picket line shows solidarity with the workers on strike, their union, and the labour movement. Refusing to cross a picket line sends a strong message to the employer that the business cannot continue as usual until they resolve the dispute with their employees.

While you are expected to report to work as usual, you are also encouraged to refrain from taking on the work of those on strike. If you're unsure whether you have to cross a picket line, it's important to note that there are no specific provisions in the Labour Relations Code that allow non-striking employees to refuse to cross a picket line.

When a strike is called, a coworker crossing the picket line and going to work can weaken the union's bargaining power and collective strength.

Picket lines serve to visibly highlight the ongoing dispute, raise public awareness of the workers' grievances, and garner external support.

## Respecting Picket Lines

During collective bargaining negotiations, a union may face a lockout or be forced to go on strike.

A lockout happens when the employer refuses to let employees work in order to push for their own terms during negotiations. This can involve actions such as denying access to the workplace, changing locks, hiring security, or shutting down operations.

On the other hand, a strike occurs when workers withdraw their labour if they are unable to improve their working conditions through negotiation.

While strikes are often a last resort, they are an important tool and a recognized right for unions.

In some cases, IAM members may encounter picket lines set up by another union that is on strike. By refusing to cross these picket lines, we can support the striking union members and put pressure on their employer.

*It's important to remember that our struggles may also be linked to those of other unions, and we may need their support in our own disputes in the future.*





## Your rights when another union pickets

The rights held by workers to respect other unions' picket lines and to refuse struck work vary across Canadian jurisdictions and can also be affected by the language of collective agreements.

*You should always check with a union representative to get advice about any specific situation.*

In some Canadian jurisdictions (including the federal jurisdiction covered by the Canada Labour Code) a refusal to cross a picket line or to do struck work can be found to be illegal strike action, not permissible in law. In these jurisdictions workers are required to report to work as usual (if it is safe to do so) and can express their support for striking workers in other ways, by listening to what they have to say, joining them outside working hours and by raising objections through their union representatives to assignments of struck work.





## **Rights under the British Columbia Labour Relations Code when another union pickets**

Workers covered by the British Columbia Labour Relations Code can refuse to cross any legal picket line.

The BC Code was amended in 2024 to close a loophole to make sure that provincially regulated workers in BC can choose to respect the picket lines of workers covered by federal or other provincial labour laws, as well as the picket lines of BC regulated workers, without this being considered illegal strike action. In making this change the BC government issued the following statement:

*Honouring the picket lines of other workers is a fundamental feature of B.C. labour relations and the change adheres to the core principles of labour solidarity.*

A picket line is considered legal unless it is found to be illegal either by a Labour Relations Board ruling or by the courts. An employer does not get to decide the legality of a picket line.

## What happens if you choose to cross another union's picket line?

The IAM Constitution allows a member to charge another member with crossing a picket line, whether ours or another union's.

The IAM Constitution states that a member may be subject to discipline after the charge is fully investigated and a trial is held.

Discipline may include:

- Reprimand in writing
- A fine
- Suspension from membership for a specified period of time
- Suspension of the right to hold office for a specified period of time
- Expulsion from membership, or prohibition from holding office
- Any combination of the foregoing penalties







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