

Five things you should know about: What the city will do if two civic unions strike

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[Allison Hanes](#)

The city will today announce contingency plans as a strike deadline nears for two Toronto civic unions, which could legally hit the picket lines as of midnight on Monday. Although bargaining continues, the National Post's Allison Hanes offers five things to know about the plans:

1 The city's non-unionized employees, including managers and supervisors, have been informed they won't be able to take their scheduled summer vacations if indoor and/or outdoor workers strike next week. They are also being trained to do front line jobs (such as prosecute traffic tickets instead of plot legal strategy, for instance). Their association is laying a big guilt trip on the city --and rightly so. The City of Toronto Administrative, Professional and Supervisory Association said in a widely distributed letter that while they agree all hands on deck are needed in the event of labour strife, they were also stripped of their cost-of-living increases and bonuses this year as part of Mayor David Miller's belt-tightening.

2 The city has already said in the event of a work stoppage, certain services will be maintained throughout the strike. These include police, fire, transit, community housing, long-term care for the elderly, which are represented by different unions. Emergency Medical Services --ambulance-- will be in a legal strike position next week, but there is already an agreement between the city and the union to maintain critical operations. The city promised to "widely communicate" its contingency plan in advance of any disruption.

3 Negotiations continue with Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 79, representing indoor staff, and Local 416, comprised of outdoor workers, after a blowup two weeks ago. Local 79 and the city publicly accused each other of bargaining in bad faith, then got back to the table under a news blackout. Last week, Mark Ferguson, president of Local 416, which includes garbage workers, made a statement calling a strike highly possible. Both unions have been without a contract since January.

4 The critical hang-up is sick leave. Currently, unionized employees get 18 sick days a year, which they can bank and cash out at the end of their careers, allowing them to collect their salaries for up to six months. The current plan is a \$186-million unfunded liability on Toronto's books. Non-union staff already agreed to a new sick-leave program, but both unions have rejected the city's proposal.

5 The big question is: are these down-to-the-wire negotiations going to end up more like 2002 or more like 2005? In 2002, both indoor and outdoor workers walked off the job days apart, with Local 79 allowing trash to pile up from June 26, 2002, until the two unions were

legislated back to work by the province on July 11, 2002. In 2005 -the last round of contract talks -Local 416 extended strike deadlines twice before settling and Local 79 and the city managed to come to an agreement without threats of a strike. If both inside and outside workers unions strike on Monday, it will be the first time they walk out simultaneously.

ahanes@nationalpost.com