

# The BC CONSTRUCTION MONITOR

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## Open Shop Dominant in Trades Training



Chris Gardner  
ICBA President

It's their last seemingly plausible claim to fame and relevance: the notion that the B.C. Building Trades unions play a uniquely important role in training construction workers. Their only problem: it's a complete myth.

At ICBA, we've always known the open shop is leading the way in apprenticeships, and now we've proven it. Data obtained from the Industry Training

Authority shows an even smaller role in apprenticeship training for the old-school unions than most might have guessed.

In B.C. today, non-union construction companies – like the ones who make up ICBA – sponsor four times as many apprentices as unions. Open shop accounts for 23,172 – or 81.5 per cent – of the 28,432 British Columbians currently pursuing construction trades certification. The unions' share is only 15 per cent.

Apprenticeship training is fundamentally important to the long-term health of our industry and to our provincial

economy. And ICBA members and other open shop contractors are the ones taking on the largest share of this crucial responsibility.

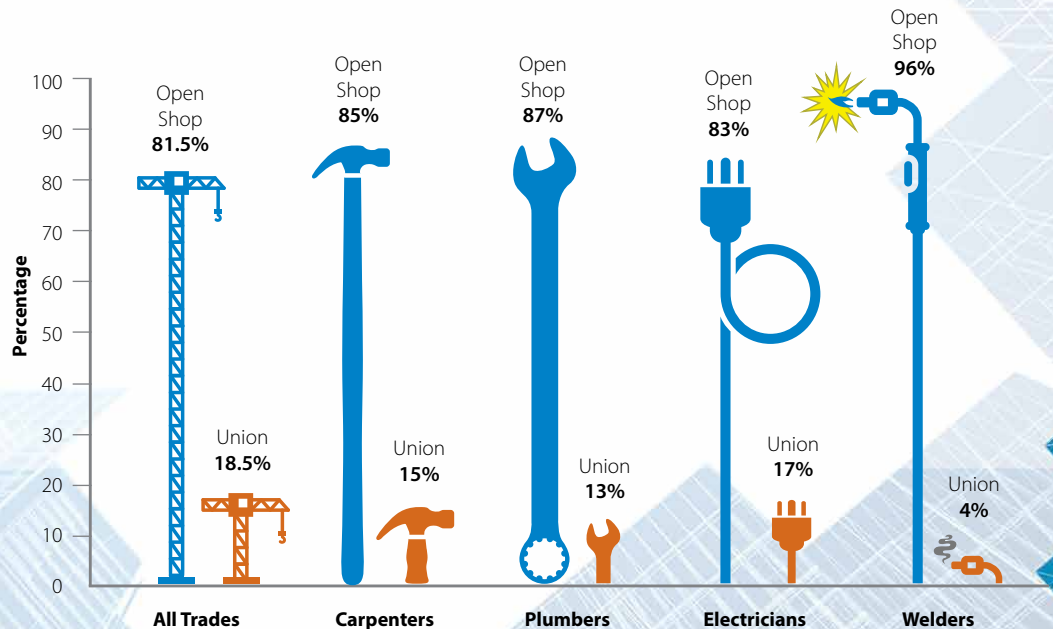
The Building Trades often forget that learning a skill and mastering a craft happens on the job working side-by-side with colleagues who have experience and expertise. All of this makes the NDP Government's move to Building Trades-union-only monopolies on major taxpayer-funded projects so offensive. Freezing out 85% of construction workers is unfair, discriminatory and costly to workers and taxpayers.

## Who is Building B.C.'s Construction Industry?

In many of the most important construction trades, open shop dominance over union training is clear. Carpenters, plumbers and electricians are overwhelmingly trained by open shop contractors.

**96%**  
of WELDERS in B.C.  
are trained by  
**OPEN SHOP**  
CONTRACTORS

### Trades Apprentice Sponsors: Open Shop v. Unions



Source: Industry Training Authority

# How the Apprenticeship Numbers Break Down

Categories	Trades	# of Apprentices in B.C.
<p>The Shut Outs – No Union Apprentices</p> <p><b>100%+ Open Shop</b></p>	<p>Domestic/Commercial Gasfitter (Class B) - Electric Motor System Technician (Winder Electrician) - Gasfitter (Class A) - Industrial Instrument Mechanic - Machinist - Marine Mechanical Technician - Marine Service Technician - Metal Fabricator - Mobile Crane Operator, Hydraulic 80T&amp;&lt; - Residential Building Maintenance Worker - Residential Steep Roofer - Rig Technician - Security Systems Technician - Tower Crane Operator - Transport Trailer Technician - Utility Arborist</p> <p>16 TRADES</p>	<p><b>1,928</b> APPRENTICES</p>
<p>Unions have fewer than 10% of Apprentices</p> <p><b>90%+ Open Shop</b></p>	<p>Industrial Electrician - Welder - Heavy Duty Equipment Technician - Truck and Transport Mechanic - Industrial Mechanic (Millwright) - Roofer</p> <p>6 TRADES</p>	<p><b>5,131</b> APPRENTICES</p>
<p>Unions have 10-19% of Apprentices</p> <p><b>80%+ Open Shop</b></p>	<p>Plumber - Carpenter - Diesel Engine Mechanic - Construction Electrician</p> <p>4 TRADES</p>	<p><b>15,810</b> APPRENTICES</p>
<p>Unions have 20-29% of Apprentices</p> <p><b>70%+ Open Shop</b></p>	<p>Architectural Sheet Metal Worker - Refrigeration Mechanic - Tilesetter - Glazier</p> <p>4 TRADES</p>	<p><b>1,620</b> APPRENTICES</p>
<p>Unions have 30-39% of Apprentices</p> <p><b>60%+ Open Shop</b></p>	<p>Sprinkler System Installer - Ironworker (Reinforcing)</p> <p>2 TRADES</p>	<p><b>420</b> APPRENTICES</p>
<p>Unions have 40-49% of Apprentices</p> <p><b>50%+ Open Shop</b></p>	<p>Painter and Decorator - Bricklayer (Mason) - Lather - Steamfitter-Pipefitter - Powerline Technician</p> <p>5 TRADES</p>	<p><b>1,388</b> APPRENTICES</p>

**Well over 80% of B.C.'s current construction apprentices are non-union.**

## ICBA: The Largest Sponsor of Apprentices in B.C.

ICBA is the single-largest construction apprenticeship sponsor in B.C., with more than 1,100 apprentices registered. ICBA's administrative support makes it easier for employers of all sizes to help train the next generation of tradespeople. It also offers employment referrals, bursaries and other supports,

contributing to completion rates that far exceed overall performance across the industry training system.<sup>1</sup> But that is not the whole story. ICBA members and open shop contractors sponsor thousands and thousands of other apprentices across B.C.

<sup>1</sup> The ITA and Trades Training in B.C., February 2014, see page 47.

# Two Apprentice Plumbers, Two Dramatically Different Experiences



Alex takes the old-school, 1970s route of being sponsored by the Canadian arm of a U.S.-based craft union that claims “jurisdiction” over the plumbing trades.

Alex’s union limits the intake of apprentices, with restrictive caps on the number that can be trained in any given workplace. So he was lucky to get in the door, although now he’ll be limited to tasks falling strictly within the “jurisdictional rules” defining his trade.



Ashley is part of the large majority of B.C. apprentices who are sponsored by an open-shop contractor or association, or by a progressive union.<sup>2</sup>

Ashley is keen on plumbing, but wants to be multi-skilled. Since her employer encourages employees to work as teams, Ashley gets additional experience that is not strictly within her own trade.



Ashley’s open shop employer refunds her technical training tuition as she completes each level, and since ICBA is her sponsor, she also receives bursaries.



Ashley chooses where and when she does technical training, and goes to Pacific Vocational College in Burnaby. It has top-notch shops and instructors, constantly refreshed curriculum, digital and other learning innovations, and high Red Seal pass rates.



Alex will depend on the union hiring hall to get work hours from the 15% of employers organized by the Building Trades, for his work-based training.



Alex is a hard worker and a skilled apprentice – but the collective agreement has no bonus or profit-sharing incentives to reward his dedication to the job.



Ashley is also a hard worker and skilled apprentice, but she sees payback in the form of merit-based wages and bonuses and profit-sharing programs.



Now certified, Ashley has a broad skill set setting her up for diverse educational and career opportunities, and she’s already thriving within the open shop sector which employs 85% of construction workers.



If Alex stays on the union track after he’s certified, he’ll be limited to 15% of the opportunities in the construction sector where the Building Trades have work.



If Ashley needs to find a new employer, an ICBA referral program is there to help, and she’ll remain ICBA-sponsored throughout the process.

<sup>2</sup> Open shop contractors employ people regardless of whether they are union members or not. Progressive unions typically represent everyone in a workplace rather than only people in a specific trade. Neither are affiliated with the B.C. Building Trades.



# Which Pond Would You Rather Fish In?

The B.C. Building Trades used to have a near monopoly on everything except single-family home construction. But beginning in the 1980s - with milestones like the non-union breakthrough in building Expo 86 - openness, fairness and transparency defined which contractors won work. As a result, workers had more choice, more opportunity and more flexibility in where and how to work. They also gained higher wages and better benefits working open shop.



The BC CONSTRUCTION MONITOR is an ICBA publication providing ahead-of-the-curve information and statistics on the B.C. construction industry and issues relevant to it.

The Monitor draws on analyses and outlooks from various sources, and provides current and substantive insight. This regular publication is intended for industry executives, government decision makers, journalists and other opinion leaders.

You can receive the Monitor in print or digital formats, and let us know if you have colleagues who would also be interested in it. We also welcome your feedback and story suggestions. Please email us at [info@icba.ca](mailto:info@icba.ca).

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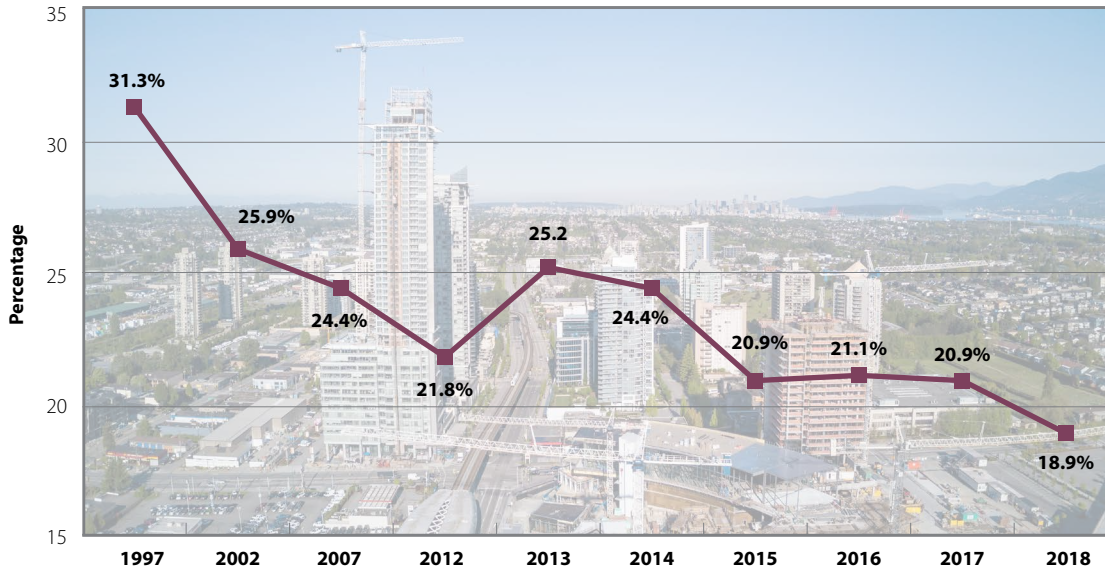
#700 - 4730 Kingsway  
Burnaby, B.C.  
V5H 0C6

#203 - 2666 Queensway  
Prince George, B.C.  
V2L 1N2

Box 6585  
Fort St. John, B.C.  
V1J 4J1

604-298-7795  
1.800.663.2865  
[www.icba.ca](http://www.icba.ca)  
[info@icba.ca](mailto:info@icba.ca)

Union Coverage (% of workers) in B.C. Construction Industry



Source: Statistics Canada

## So Long B.C. and Thanks for all the Training

In one of the odder twists of union involvement in trades training, earlier this year the Plumbing Industry College advertised a program to help qualified Canadian plumbers get licenced to work in... New Zealand. "Before you leave Canada, we will support you through the required steps taking the stress and inconvenience out of this timely process," the PIC web site says. With the shortage of skilled workers at historic highs, we would all be better served if the Building Trades focused on training workers for opportunities in B.C. and not on shipping them halfway across the world.



Source: [www.uapicbc.ca/plumbing-training-for-new-zealand/](http://www.uapicbc.ca/plumbing-training-for-new-zealand/) Accessed July 21, 2019