COCA

Council of Ontario Construction Associations

GOVERNMENT RELATIONS REPORT

August 2026

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Canada–U.S. Tariffs Put Pressure on Ontario's Building Sector

Introduction

The Ontario construction industry is under strain following the collapse of U.S.-Canada trade talks and the subsequent rollout of 50% U.S. tariffs. The newly enacted American 50% tariffs—issued under Section 338 of the Tariff Act of 1930—cover $27.6 billion worth of Canadian goods (approximately 5% of Canada's annual exports to the U.S.). The White House designed these proclamations to target sectors spanning heavy construction, agriculture, and everyday consumer items.

The cement sector, in particular, faces a major challenge as costs for raw concrete mix rise across North America, representing a substantial blow to the construction supply chain. Additionally, preexisting heavy industry levies continue to exert pressure, with the Section 338 penalty adding to ongoing U.S. tariffs on Canadian softwood lumber, now taxed at 45%, as well as on aluminum, steel, and copper.

Paired with Canada's upcoming dollar-for-dollar retaliatory tariffs on American steel, aluminum, and machinery, the province's building sector is bracing for an estimated 8% to 10% surge in overall project costs.

Reaction

Government of Canada response

In response to the U.S. imposing a 50% tariff on $27.6 billion in Canadian goods, the federal government announced it will match the new U.S. tariffs dollar for dollar, effective September 8, targeting sectors such as steel, dairy, appliances, agricultural equipment, pulp and paper, and electronics. Alongside the counter-tariffs, Ottawa unveiled a $7.5 billion package of support for affected workers and businesses, building on nearly $25 billion in support provided since the tariffs began, including expanded liquidity programs, a new diversification fund, and enhanced EI and training supports for displaced workers.

Read the news release

Province of Ontario response

On August 24, 2026, the Ontario government announced it is immediately broadening eligibility for the Protect Ontario Financing Program (POFP) in response to the United States' newly enacted section 338 tariffs on a range of Canadian imports. The program, which provides up to $1 billion in loans to Ontario-based businesses facing tariff-related working capital challenges such as payroll, lease, and utility payments, is meant to help exporters hit by the new 50% tariff spike as well as those still subject to existing section 232 tariffs on steel, aluminum, copper, and automotives. The expansion is part of the province's broader $30 billion tariff relief and support plan, and Premier Doug Ford said the government would "do whatever it takes" to protect Ontario jobs and paycheques.

Read the news release

ECAO response

Preliminary Canada–U.S. Tariff Impact Assessment for Ontario Electrical Contractors

(Graeme Aitken of the Electrical Contractors Association of Ontario (ECAO) shared this article, which he drafted, with COCA before he circulated it to his association's members. While it was drafted for electrical contractors, the themes apply across the construction industry. Thanks, Graeme, for sharing.)

ECAO is warning Ontario electrical contractors to prepare for possible Canada–U.S. tariff impacts, especially on U.S.-origin electrical equipment, steel, aluminum and components. While final details are still unknown, contractors should confirm product origins, monitor supplier pricing and lead times, protect contract notice rights, and plan carefully for bids and long-lead materials

Click here to read the complete article.

Other articles

- **Canadian Society of Association Executives (CSAE)**: Canada's response to U.S. tariffs, and where to get your questions answered (COCA is a longstanding CSAE member): https://csae.com/news/canada-tariff-response-plan-2026/
- **Sussex Strategy Group:** Federal government announces retaliatory tariffs and industry supports: https://mailchi.mp/b9d5e8d6f506/ford-delivers-on-campaign-promises-5267715?e=8f06f66f69
- **Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO):** Impact on the infrastructure projects: https://www.amo.on.ca/policy/finance-infrastructure-and-economy/mhip-non-dc-stream-amo-responds-new-tariffs-provincial

Skills Ontario to Receive SDF Funding to Train Construction Workers

Minister of Labour Immigration Training and Skills Development, David Piccini, recently announced that $9.6 million from the Skills Development Fund Training Stream is being invested in six projects. Skills Ontario will receive $1,190,240, some of which will be used to train future construction workers. The six projects are:

- Automotive Industries Association of Canada is receiving $3,000,000 to train 216 people for rewarding careers in the automotive sector and upskill existing workers. Participants will receive hands-on training in automotive service and emerging technologies, while licensed journeypersons and senior apprentices will build specialized skills in electric and hybrid vehicles while advancing driver assistance systems to keep pace with evolving industry needs.
- John Howard Society of Ottawa is receiving $194,986 to connect 50 jobseekers from underrepresented groups to meaningful employment in the construction, manufacturing and automotive sectors. Participants will receive trade-specific training, industry-recognized certifications and individualized employment supports, including job matching and career coaching, to prepare for in-demand careers, such as being an automotive service technician, electrician or plumber.
- Skills Ontario is receiving $1,190,240 to train 250 participants for rewarding careers in the construction, manufacturing and mining sectors. Through sector-specific training, career coaching and workplace readiness supports, participants will develop essential skills and access to job placements in occupations such as carpentry, plumbing and industrial trades supervision.
- Youth Ottawa is receiving $2,687,150 to train 350 young people for rewarding careers in the skilled trades through micro-credentials in safety, technical foundations and construction. Through a free six-week program, participants will receive hands-on training, workplace certifications and AI-powered learning supports, while building connections with employers and preparing for careers in the electrical trades.
- Canadian Marine Careers Foundation is receiving $987,376 to train 96 people for rewarding seafaring positions onboard domestic vessels such as cargo ships, tugs and ferries that support Ontario's major industries, including helping existing workers advance into higher-skilled positions. Participants will receive hands-on training in marine safety and seamanship, earn industry-recognized certifications and connect directly with marine employers.

The government's News Release can be accessed here:

https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1007896/ontario-investing-more-than-98-million-to-protect-and-train-workers-in-major-canadian-industries

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Please welcome the new AMCO Executive Director Mary Burk to Our COCA Team

Mary brings more than 15 years of senior leadership experience in human resources, labour relations, organizational strategy, and operations to the Association of Millwriting Contractors of Ontario. Throughout her career, she has built a reputation for collaborative leadership, strategic thinking, and a strong commitment to supporting organizations through growth, change, and member engagement.

Mary's extensive labour relations experience was developed while serving as Human Resources Director for a highly unionized organization supporting aviation, transportation, municipal, and industrial-sector clients, including Air Canada and the City of Toronto. In that role, she served as the employer representative during collective bargaining negotiations, leading negotiation strategy, contract costing, grievance resolution, and labour-management relations. She has successfully participated in multiple rounds of collective bargaining while fostering positive relationships with unions, legal counsel, and operational leadership.

One of Mary's greatest strengths is her ability to combine labour relations expertise with strong financial and operational insight. Her strategic approach has helped organizations achieve sustainable, long-term outcomes while maintaining productive relationships with key stakeholders.

As Executive Director, Mary is committed to strengthening AMCO's support for its members, advancing the association's strategic priorities, and fostering meaningful collaboration across the municipal sector. She looks forward to working closely with the Board of Directors, member municipalities, industry partners, and stakeholders to build upon AMCO's strong foundation and continue delivering value to the membership.

Please welcome Mary to our COCA TEAM!!!!

WSIB Consolidates Regional Offices

The following points about the WSIB's office consolidation and optimization of its business model were gleaned from an email conversation with an official at the WSIB:

- Prior to the pandemic, the WSIB had offices in Windsor, St. Catharine's, Guelph, Kingston, North Bay, Sudbury, Sault Ste. Marie, Timmins and Thunder Bay. Those offices have been closed permanently but those communities will continue to have local Return to Work Specialists working in the field to assist locally as they do today.
- The WSIB has not provided in-office service since before the pandemic
- The WSIB is consolidating office locations that support claim and account management functions, which will lead to relocation of some roles and other adjustments to staffing needs in some communities.
- The WSIB currently has offices for staff in London, Hamilton, Waterloo and downtown Toronto
- The WSIB will be opening additional office space in Mississauga, North York, Scarborough and Ottawa to accommodate return to in-office full time
- The WSIB is taking steps to optimize its business model to ensure the organization continues to deliver effective, sustainable services across Ontario
- Over the past few years, the WSIB has made significant improvements to its service delivery model and today most claim and account services work is done online, by phone, or directly in the community.
- This service delivery model allows the WSIB to efficiently manage resources, improve accessibility, and direct work to the team members best positioned to support the people in need, regardless of where they are located.
- People who need the WSIB's help after a workplace injury anywhere in Ontario will continue to:
  - connect with the WSIB through phone and online services
  - access the care they need through local health care providers
  - receive return-to-work support in their workplace or community
- The WSIB has an expanded network of care providers so people in need of care may be able to access it closer to home
- The WSIB continues to expand local partnerships to support recovery and return to work.
- These changes are part of ensuring the WSIB remains a modern, sustainable organization. Our focus remains the same: supporting people across Ontario when they need us most and delivering value for the premiums Ontario businesses pay.

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Progress Being Made on Access Roads to the Ring of Fire

Here are quotes taken from a recent government of Ontario news release about the progress that's being made on access roads to service the Ring of Fire:

"Today (August 24, 2026) Greg Rickford, Minister of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation and Minister Responsible for Ring of Fire Economic and Community Partnerships, and Aroland First Nation Chief Joseph Sonny Gagnon, announced that work commenced on major upgrades to the Anaconda and Painter Lake roads as of June 30, 2026, marking another significant milestone in the government's plan to protect Ontario by building the roads to the Ring of Fire, five years ahead of schedule."

"Work on Anaconda and Painter Lake roads continues the momentum on Ontario's accelerated plan to complete roads to the Ring of Fire. Under the accelerated plan, pending all necessary approvals and consultation:

- Construction on the Webequie Supply Road started in June 2026 and will be open by November 2030, four years ahead of schedule
- The Marten Falls Community Access Road is scheduled to start construction in August 2026 and open by November 2031, four years ahead of schedule
- The Northern Road Link is scheduled to start construction in spring 2028 and open November 2031, five years ahead of schedule."

For the full text of the government's news release, click on the following link:

https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1007926/ontario-and-aroland-first-nation-break-ground-on-ring-of-fire-road

Widening of Highway 69 Accelerated

Transportation Minister Prabmeet Sarkaria recently announced the accelerated widening of the remaining 2 lane portion of highway 69 between Parry Sound and Sudbury. Here are the highlights from the announcement:

- Highway 69 is a critical transportation corridor connecting northern and southern Ontario.
- While the widening of this important highway has been ongoing for decades, 68 kilometers between Parry Sound and Sudbury are still only 2 lanes
- A CN Rail line will have to be relocated to allow the construction of a new intersection with highway 522
- The widening will be split into six sections, four of which will be under heavy construction by the end of next year

The Minister did not give a date when all six sections would be completed.

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New Power Generation Planned for Site of Former Lambton Generating Station

- On August 25th Minister of Energy and Mines, Stephen Lecce, announced that the government of Ontario will invest $500,000 to help ensure that St. Clair Township's infrastructure is ready to support OPG's plans to build new generation capacity on the site of the former Lambton Generating Station
- Ontario's electricity demand is forecast to increase by as much as 90 per cent by 2050, driven by population growth, new housing, electrification, advanced manufacturing and the expansion of critical minerals supply chains.
- The 1200-acre OPG site in St Clair Township, the former home of the Lambton Generating Station, a coal fired plant that was shuttered in 2013, is already zoned to host up to 900 megawatts (MW) of new generation, enough to power up to 900,000 additional homes.
- The Council of St. Clair Township endorsed continued engagement with OPG and the Ministry of Energy and Mines on the potential for new energy generation, including nuclear power, at the Lambton site

For the government's news release, click on the following link:

https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1007931/ontario-doubles-down-on-made-in-canada-energy

Ontario By Election Polls

Work performed by poll aggregator Canada 338 on the three Ontario by-elections scheduled for September 3, 2026, produced the following results:

- In Scarborough Southwest, the NDP will hold onto this seat that was vacated by former NDP MPP (now Liberal MP) Doly Begum
- In the solidly blue riding of York-Simcoe, the Tories will retain this seat with a wide margin of victory
- The Tories should retain the Hamilton East-Stoney Creek seat in the legislature previously held by former MPP Neil Lumsden although the margin of victory will be tight with the NDP putting up a strong showing in a riding they once held for many years

In our opinion, Hamilton East-Stoney Creek will be a squeaker which could be narrowly won by NDP candidate and former MPP for Hamilton Mountain (2013-2024) Monique Taylor.

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Premier Ford and Tories Enjoy Favourability Bump in Wake of Trump Tariffs

A poll of 1,500 randomly selected Ontarians using interactive voice recording technology (IVR) conducted by Liaison Strategies on August 23 and 24th reflected a significant improvement in Premier Doug Ford and his PC government following the implementation of tariffs on Canadian goods imported into the United States, by the American Trump administration. Here are some of the poll's findings:

- Among decided and leaning voters, 39% of respondents favoured the PCs, 35% Libs, 20% NDP, 3% other and 2% Green.
- Despite the improvement in Premier Ford's own approval rating from 24% in the July Liaison poll to 36% in August, his net favourability rating remains negative with 61% disapproving of his performance; net favourability rating 61 minus 36 = negative 25
- 72% of respondents believe the province is headed in the wrong direction, 27% right direction and 2% don't know
- 44% of respondents support Canada placing tariffs on US imports that are equal in value to the tariffs imposed on Canadian goods by the United States and 39% somewhat support
- 49% support keeping American beer, wine and spirits out of the LCBO until a satisfactory trade agreement is reached and 36% somewhat support
- In terms of balancing putting pressure on the United States and accepting economic costs on Ontario, 42% of respondents preferred taking stronger measures against the United States while 35% said equal consideration should be given to both

For the full report from Liaison Strategies, click on the following link:
https://press.liaisonstrategies.ca/ontario-pcs-lead-liberals-by-4-as-ford-rebounds-amid-trump-trade-fight/