



Neon Signs to Solar Panels

On January 26, 1920, a committee comprised of five members of the international office of the IBEW and five representatives from the National Association of Electrical Contractors and Dealers (the predecessor of NECA) adopted a resolution for putting the principles into action by setting up the Council on Industrial Relations (CIR).

In the following years, the partnership began incorporating the “CIR clause” in their collective bargaining agreements. The agreement to insert the “no-strike” clause was intended to “stabilize union shops” and give them “an edge over nonunion shops.”

They agreed to submit any disputes they cannot resolve to the national CIR panel made up of twelve members, six representatives from the IBEW and six representatives from NECA. The panelists were chosen for their ability to render fair and equitable decisions based on the facts. When the members of the Council were in session, they did not represent either NECA or IBEW, but rather the electrical industry. Their decisions were unanimous before they became official.



Today the CIR meets four times a year to hear grievances, interpret existing agreements, and to arbitrate contract negotiations. In each case, the parties must have tried to settle their differences thus replacing the need for arbitration that could be astronomically costly or labor strikes that could be self-destructive to the industry.

Over the course of 90 years, the CIR served as a “supreme court” of the electrical construction industry, settling more than 8,000 disputes without a labor strike, earning for the partnership, in North America, the title “strikeless industry.”

Many NECA/IBEW Local 48 members have served on the CIR:

- Ed Barnes
- George Adams
- Max Landon
- Brian Christopher
- Gary Price
- H.D. “Buzz” Allison
- Tim Gauthier
- Stan Adams
- R.D. Dimitre
- Robert Burns
- Larry Rodgers
- S.I. Bud Jaggar

Its practices like the CIR and the “no-strike” clause that make NECA/IBEW Local 48 an example to the rest of the industry. Revolutionary in the 1920’s as well as today, NECA/IBEW Local 48 will continue to set industry trends.

The Future of the Electrical Field

Though commonplace now, in the 1920s neon signs were a new invention, which quickly caught on as a popular fixture in outdoor advertising in the U.S. Neon became symbolic of America’s inventiveness and creativity. Through the 1920’s and 30’s extravagant neon displays and elaborate neon signs became the norm and these large scale signs began to dominate American cities from New York to California.

During the 1920’s IBEW Local 48’s membership increased, with postwar expansion in the Portland area, to radio broadcasting, manufacturing, neon signs and exterior lighting, along with the sale, installation, and repair of electrical appliances.

In 1928, 22 Local 48 electricians working for Electrical Products Corporation installed what was reputedly the largest neon sign in the world, for the Richfield Oil Company. Each of the nine letters in the company name stood 60 feet high. Each letter was supported by two to four wooden telegraph poles. With each letter set 100 feet apart, the sign stretched 725 feet in length, 1,200 feet above Portland, legible for 20 miles and visible from 100 miles.

In the not-to-distant past, green technologies such as solar and wind power were just as new as neon signs. NECA/IBEW Local 48 made sure its members were well versed in the emerging technology then, just as it has over the last 100 years.

Even more recently, LED light bulbs have been gaining popularity. With a lifespan and electrical efficiency several times greater than incandescent lamps, and are significantly more efficient than most fluorescent lamps, the LED lamp market is projected to grow by more than twelve-fold over the next decade. NECA/IBEW Local 48 has also been at the forefront of this new technology, not only with member training but by upgrading the lighting system in the Training Center and NECA Chapter office (inside and out) to LEDs.

There will always be new technology in the electrical field, and NECA/IBEW Local 48 will always make sure its members have the opportunities to become experts.

