

# December 2023 Environmental Scan

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# Claims of toxic workplace at CSIS absolutely 'devastating,' PM says

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau says allegations of a toxic workplace culture involving harassment and sexual assault at Canada's spy agency are "devastating" and "absolutely unacceptable."

His comments come after a Canadian Press investigation revealed four officers with the Canadian Security Intelligence Service raised concerns about a toxic culture within the British Columbia office.

One CSIS officer says she was raped nine times by a senior colleague while in surveillance vehicles, while another says she was sexually assaulted by the same man, despite a warning to their bosses that the man needed to be kept away from young women. CBC News has not independently verified the allegations.

Trudeau, who was in Ajax, Ont., for a separate announcement, says the allegations are of "deep, deep concern."

He says the government needs to make sure everyone in every workplace — no matter how sensitive or secret their work is — is protected, particularly people who serve their country.

Trudeau says his minister and his entire government are following up "very directly" on the issues.

# CSIS officers allege rape, harassment and a toxic workplace culture

A rookie surveillance officer with Canada's spy agency and another officer decades her senior were tracking a person in British Columbia in the summer of 2019 when they lost sight of their target.

She said the senior officer later blamed a communications failure due to a radio dead zone.

But the woman said the real reason was her colleague was raping her, having broken off surveillance to drive to a parkade where the alleged attack took place in their Canadian Security Intelligence Service vehicle. The man, who was supposed to be her mentor and coach, treated his "own needs as more important than doing the job," she said in an interview.

She said she was raped by her colleague nine times while at work in CSIS surveillance vehicles between July 2019 and February 2020.

A second officer said she too was sexually assaulted as a rookie by the same officer in surveillance vehicles during covert missions, despite warnings from the first to their bosses that he should not be partnered with young women.

# CSIS to probe B.C. office after allegations of rape, harassment and toxic workplace

Canada's spy agency has launched a workplace assessment of its British Columbia office over what it calls “serious allegations” raised by whistleblowers, who say they were sexually assaulted and harassed by a senior officer.

The Canadian Security Intelligence Service said the officer who was “implicated” in the allegations – made public in an investigation by The Canadian Press this week – was removed from the workplace.

One officer said she was raped nine times in 2019 and 2020 by a senior colleague while in surveillance vehicles, and a second officer said she was later sexually assaulted by the same man despite bosses being warned not to pair him with young women.

“This will be instrumental in identifying and resolving potential barriers to a safe, healthy and respectful workplace as well as restoring the workplace climate,” he said.

The statement said that when the agency first heard about the allegations, it launched a third-party investigation “without delay.”

# 'It's really quite shocking': West Vancouver mayor under investigation

A West Vancouver politician is under investigation for “potential spending irregularities”, according to Elections BC.

Elections BC confirmed to CTV News that it identified the alleged irregularities during a compliance review of Mayor Mark Sager’s campaign financing disclosure report for the 2022 general local elections.

“When we identify a potential contravention of legislation, we can conduct an investigation ourselves or forward the file to one of our law enforcement partners,” the non-partisan organization said in an email.

In a statement to CTV News, Const. Sam Zacharias, a media relations officer with the Port Moody Police Department said it’s been engaged by Elections BC to conduct the investigation.

“At this time, I am unable to provide details on the nature of the investigation or the people involved in the investigation as it is active and ongoing,” Zacharias said in an email.

# B.C. whistleblower hopes allegations of rape, harassment at CSIS ‘lit a match’

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The Canadian Security Intelligence Service said the officer who was “implicated” in the allegations — made public in an investigation by The Canadian Press this week — was removed from the workplace.

One officer said she was raped nine times in 2019 and 2020 by a senior colleague while in surveillance vehicles, and a second officer said she was later sexually assaulted by the same man despite bosses being warned not to pair him with young women.

A statement from CSIS Director David Vigneault on Friday said accusations of a “toxic workplace” cannot be taken lightly, and a Workplace Climate Assessment had been launched in the B.C. office.

“This will be instrumental in identifying and resolving potential barriers to a safe, healthy and respectful workplace as well as restoring the workplace climate,” he said.

# Speech after long silence: 2 original UPEI complainants tell their stories to board members

The University of Prince Edward Island says it's making good on a commitment it made more than a decade ago to two women who came forward in 2012 with complaints of sexual harassment against the university's former president.

The announcement came after a remarkable meeting Tuesday evening at which those two women — Wendy Carroll and Erin Casey — appeared in person to deliver victim impact statements to board of governors members behind closed doors.

After their presentation, Casey spoke briefly to reporters to deliver a prepared statement. She and Carroll declined requests to be interviewed.

"Sharing our stories is an important first step on a path of reflection and, we hope, reconciliation," Casey said, noting that the women had invited the board members "to witness the injustice we've experienced over the past decade" since making their complaints against Alaa Abd-El-Aziz.



# CSIS director claims senior officer accused of sexual harassment 'removed from service'

The Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) has spoken up to correct what it claims to be “factual inaccuracies” in the media’s reporting of sexual harassment allegations raised by two workers.

These inaccuracies include details about “CSIS’s promptness, its response and its exhaustive investigations” into the allegations, according to a statement from David Vigneault, CSIS director.

“Immediately upon learning of the allegations of inappropriate workplace behaviour, CSIS launched a third-party investigation without delay and the individual implicated by the allegations was removed from the workplace,” read part of the statement. “The recommendations are currently being actioned.”

Last week, The Canadian Press reported that one CSIS officer claimed that she was raped by one senior officer nine times while at work in CSIS surveillance vehicles between July 2019 and February 2020. Another female officer also said she was sexually assaulted as a rookie by the same officer in surveillance vehicles during covert missions, according to the report.

The report also noted that the two women felt unable to go to police, in part because of an obligation to secrecy, including a law against identifying themselves or others as CSIS officers, and a belief “the organization would cover things up.”

# Workplace expert says conditions at Canada's spy agency ripe for harassment

Toxic workplace claims against Canada's spy agency point to a "perfect storm" of conditions that allow harassment to occur and rooting them out could require more than removing one "bad apple," says an expert on employment discrimination.

Beth Hirsh, a University of British Columbia sociology professor who studies workplace discrimination and the effect of legal claims on organizations, said lawsuits against the Canadian Security Intelligence Service contain "egregious" allegations.

CSIS announced last week it had launched a workplace climate assessment in its British Columbia office over claims made public in an investigation by The Canadian Press.

Two covert officers who are suing the federal government said they were sexually assaulted at work by the same senior colleague, that bullying and harassment went unchecked and they were failed by the internal investigation mechanism at CSIS.

Hirsh said organizations like CSIS, where people work in physical and social isolation, "exemplify many of the things that we talk about in terms of textbook examples of conditions that lead to harassment and discrimination.

# Thunder Bay group home fined after 2022 workplace violence incident injures two

A Thunder Bay group home operator was fined for not conducting a workplace risk assessment prior to two workers being assaulted by a resident in 2022.

Dilico Anishinabek Family Care entered a guilty plea in Provincial Offences Court in Thunder Bay last month and was fined \$80,000 plus the usual 25 per cent victim fine surcharge under the Provincial Offences Act.

Dilico is a child welfare, health and mental health and addictions services provider based in Fort William First Nation.

The court said Dilico failed, as an employer, to assess the risks of workplace violence that may arise from the nature of the workplace, the type of work or the conditions of work at a workplace.

The offence occurred May 16, 2022. The conviction was this past Nov. 17.

Dilico Anishinabek Family Care operates a mental health treatment group home in Thunder Bay for high-risk client residents between the ages of 12 and 17.

# Dec 6 National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women

December 6th marks the 34th anniversary of the École Polytechnique Massacre, which occurred on December 6, 1989, in Montreal. The perpetrator, fueled by misogynistic beliefs, took the lives of 14 young women that day. Three decades later, the impact of this horrific act of violence continues to reverberate through the ongoing struggle against gender-based violence.

The risk of harassment and violence tragically continues to be a daily reality for many workers, particularly affecting women who are Indigenous, black and people of colour, and gender-diverse people.

The importance of activism in challenging these systemic issues cannot be overstated. Advocacy, organizing, education, and policy changes are critical components of the ongoing struggle to create and cultivate safer, more equitable spaces for all workers.

The National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women is a fitting time to underscore the work of our union's active Women and Gender Rights Committee, lead by our president Stephanie Smith. The committee's primary role is to make recommendations to our union's Provincial Executive on the elimination of specifically identified systemic barriers, to ensure the full participation of women, trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming members in our union.

This year, the committee hosted our first women and gender rights conference – Intersectionality – what does it mean? – in Fort St. John. Many activists and gender-diverse members came together to explore intersectionality as a framework for tackling overlapping forms of prejudice and discrimination, and to discuss critical issues such as domestic violence, disability rights and justice, and Indigenous reconciliation.

# Social worker says she was blacklisted from GN for filing grievance

A social worker says she was blacklisted from working for the Government of Nunavut for reporting a supervisor who tried to make her store a client's soiled mattress in her home.

Her case is getting a hearing in the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario, where she lives now, after she said the GN, Nunavut Employees Union and Public Service Alliance of Canada failed her.

She provided pages of documentation to Nunatsiaq News that detail her harassment complaint, as well as the government and the unions' responses.

In 2019, Carravaggie had worked 13 years for the Department of Family Services on a casual basis and was coming to the end of a contract in Baker Lake when a new supervisor named Barbara Humenjuk arrived.

Carravaggie said that on July 18, 2019, Humenjuk ordered her to remove a soiled mattress from a foster home and place it in her own apartment.

Carravaggie refused, saying the GN had a storage area for this purpose.

# A nurse's fatal last visit to patient's home renews calls for better safety measures

WILLIMANTIC, Conn. (AP) — The killing of a Connecticut nurse making a house call in October was a nightmare come true for an industry gripped by the fear of violence.

Already stressed out by staffing shortages and mounting caseloads, health care workers are increasingly worrying about the possibility of a patient becoming violent — a scenario that is too common and on the rise nationwide.

Joyce Grayson, a 63-year-old mother of six, went into a halfway house for sex offenders in late October, to give medication to a man with a violent past. She didn't make it out alive.

Police found her body in the basement and have named her patient as the main suspect in her killing.

Grayson's death has her peers and lawmakers renewing their yearslong pleas for better protections for home health care workers, including sending them out with escorts and providing more information about their patients. The calls come during an era of increasing violence against medical professionals in general.

# CSIS boss apologizes for rape claim response, revamps harassment plan

VANCOUVER - Canada's spy chief has apologized to staff for his response to rape and harassment allegations in the agency's British Columbia office.

In a town hall this week, David Vigneault told Canadian Security Intelligence Service staff about new anti-harassment measures in what he called an “extraordinary moment.”

He said the officer accused in the complaints, details of which were made public in an investigation by The Canadian Press last week, is no longer employed by the agency, as of Monday.

He also said the agency would release annual public reports on harassment and wrongdoing in the agency.

The moves come after The Canadian Press reported on what officers called a “toxic workplace” in the agency's B.C. surveillance unit.

One officer said she was raped nine times by a senior colleague while in surveillance vehicles on missions in 2019 and 2020.

# Transcript of statement by CSIS director Vigneault during town hall meeting for staff

OTTAWA -- The director of Canada's spy agency, David Vigneault, says the officer at the centre of an investigation by The Canadian Press into allegations of rape and harassment no longer works for the agency, and an ombudsperson will be put in place to monitor workplace-related issues.

He apologized to CSIS employees at a town hall event on Tuesday for his response to last week's report about what officers called a "toxic workplace" in the British Columbia office.

Here is the transcript of Vigneault's remarks in English: I just want to start by saying: this is an extraordinary moment. As an organization, we have been through a lot. It is very challenging to be an employee of the service. I want you to know that I understand that and I also feel that. It is also a very emotional moment. We are talking to the entire organization and what is happening to one of us is affecting all of us. And so, I want to be very clear about that.

For many, this can be triggering and deeply personal, especially for our colleagues in (the) B.C. region. I want (the) B.C. region to know that we are with you. B.C. colleagues and for the (physical surveillance unit) team, I want to thank them specifically for continuing to carry out their activities and duties in challenging times. You are indeed true professionals.



# AI and employment law: an interview with ChatGPT

The world was recently introduced to Open AI's ChatGPT, an artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot that uses machine learning and natural language processing to generate responses based on prompts such as "Write me an article about AI." Over 100 million users have used ChatGPT, and such programs will revolutionize how employers operate, according to trends tracker Exploding Topics.

ChatGPT has demonstrated that AI tools can perform a wide range of business functions, including data collection, human resource (HR) solutions, and research. Given these benefits, some employers have entered into partnerships with technology companies to develop customized AI chatbots. KPMG in Australia, for example, is using a modified version of ChatGPT as a digital assistant for some of its employees.

We asked ChatGPT to summarize some of the key employment law risks for employers who use AI in their workplace. We were pleasantly surprised that the chatbot demonstrated an awareness of its own limitations and identified legal risks relating to human rights, privacy and potential breaches of the employment contract. We reviewed the answers we received and explore some of the issues AI in the workplace raises.

# Wild say they took 'appropriate steps' to address workplace concerns

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — The Minnesota Wild recently concluded two investigations into their code of conduct, and the organization said Thursday night it took “appropriate steps” to address the matters that were brought to its attention.

The Athletic reported that Bill Guerin was the focus of an investigation following a complaint by an employee who accused the team’s president of hockey operations and general manager of verbal abuse. The Athletic's report was based on anonymous sourcing, and the team statement made no mention of Guerin.

NHL Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly said in an email to the Star Tribune that the league was satisfied with how the Wild handled the situation. The Wild said they would have no further comment.

It has been a rough start to the season for Minnesota, which improved to 11-12-4 with a 3-2 shootout win over Calgary on Thursday night. It fired coach Dean Evason on Nov. 27 and replaced him with John Hynes. Assistant general manager Chris O'Hearn left the organization this week by mutual agreement with the Wild.

# Mistreatment of Dalhousie medical residents is common and underreported, study says

A newly published peer-reviewed study found that mistreatment of medical residents in the Maritimes remains common and underreported.

From October to November 2021, all 645 medical residents associated with Dalhousie University were invited to answer questions about their experiences on the job since graduating. Residents are medical school graduates who are doing training focused in a specific area, such as oncology or family medicine. Nineteen per cent responded including residents working in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island.

Twenty per cent of those said they have sometimes experienced mistreatment — defined as behaviour disrespectful of the dignity of others and which interferes with learning — since beginning residency. About eight per cent reported it happening very often or almost daily. About one in five respondents said they have never been mistreated.

Qëndresa Sahiti, a fourth-year medical student and a lead author for the study, said the issue can also affect the wider community. "Research has shown that when our doctors are well, our patients are well," she said.

# LSA recruiting more firms for program protecting articling students from harassment, discrimination

The Law Society of Alberta is recruiting law firms to join its program to support articling students who have experienced harassment and discrimination.

The Articling Placement Program, launched in 2022, was created as a solution for articling students unable to complete their articles with their law firm due to harassment or discrimination. The program became permanent earlier this year and is experiencing growing pains with increased demand.

“As the regulator, we have set a requirement for students to complete articles, and we have a responsibility to help students who are not in safe environments,” says Cori Ghitter, deputy executive director and director, policy and education at the Law Society of Alberta. “While we focus on proactive measures, we also knew there was a need to have this program.”

This program is in response to the 2019 articling report assessment. Nearly one-third of articling students said they experienced harassment or discrimination and believed resources were unavailable to deal with their concerns. They also felt that reporting their concerns would result in negative consequences. The report found women and minorities are most likely to experience harassment or discrimination.

# How to handle racialized comments: Human rights tribunal case offers insights

A recent Human Rights Tribunal of Alberta (the Tribunal) decision can serve as a template for employers when it comes to the right way to respond to allegations of workplace discrimination.

Daniel Weber, partner at McLennan Ross in Edmonton, said the case and the decision are rare examples of the perfect way for employers to respond to discrimination charges in the workplace.

“This case got me excited, for the simple fact that it puts into practice what we preach, in terms of being a good employer and being responsive,” Weber told HRD. “This is the ‘do's’ of what to do, and it's nice to be able to point a case rather than talking about it in theory, or cobbling together a bunch of cases – all the good work is in this one case.”

The case saw the complainant, Charlene Tolentino, allege to the Alberta Human Rights Commission (AHRC) that her employer, the Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee (OGPT), subjected her to a poisoned workplace due to racialized comments from a co-worker. She claimed the discrimination was a violation of section 7 of the Alberta Human Rights Act on the grounds of race, colour, ancestry, and place of origin.

# Future of Work: New Research Explores Cutting-Edge Tools Reshaping the Workplace

A groundbreaking new study has been recently made available, providing in-depth analysis and insights into the transformative tools that are poised to redefine the nature of work as we know it. This comprehensive research delves into the technological advances that are set to alter the workplace landscape, as well as the accompanying opportunities and challenges faced by professionals and organizations alike.

## Technologies Disrupting the Workplace: Impact and Adaptation

The study seeks to uncover the nuances of how emerging technologies are impacting the workplace environment. It examines the profound effects of digital transformation and how companies can navigate the transition to leverage these tools for optimal efficiency and productivity. As the report highlights, integrating new technologies into daily operations can exponentially benefit companies, yet it acknowledges the complexities and considerations that accompany such changes.

## New Collaboration Tools in Response to Work Disruption

The acceleration of remote work has ushered in a new era of collaboration tools, which have become essential for maintaining business continuity and nurturing innovation. This study identifies the latest advancements in collaboration technology, addressing the evolving needs of a dispersed workforce and the importance of fostering strong team dynamics amidst disruption.

# Ottawa will prevent AI tools from discriminating against potential hires, Anand says

The federal government will work to prevent artificial intelligence from discriminating against people applying for jobs in federal government departments, says Treasury Board President Anita Anand. In a wide-ranging year-end interview with CBC News, Anand acknowledged concerns about the use of AI tools in hiring.

"There is no question that at all times, a person's privacy needs to be respected in accordance with privacy laws, and that our hiring practices must be non-discriminatory and must be embedded with a sense of equality," Anand said when asked about the government's use of AI in its hiring process.

"Certainly, as a racialized woman, I feel this very deeply ... We need to ensure that any use of AI in the workplace ... has to be compliant with existing law and has to be able to stand the moral test of being non-discriminatory."

Some government departments have started incorporating AI tools into their hiring processes. In its response to a question posed by NDP MP Matthew Green, the Department of National Defence said it used Knockri, an AI-driven skills assessment tool, in hundreds of pre-recorded job interviews to "reduce bias and promote equity in the recruitment process."

# Identifying drag performers as gig workers could improve workplace conditions: U of G study

When you think of gig workers, Uber drivers, caterers or musicians may come to mind. But researchers at the University of Guelph want drag performers to be at the top of that list as well. Recent graduate and drag performer Matt Sbrissa created a research project called Drag as Werk alongside Thomas Sasso, assistant professor of Business and Economics at the school. The study aims to learn more about drag performers' working conditions in Canada and the U.S.

In their survey of 141 drag workers, less than 25 per cent said the majority of their income was derived from performing. "They're often hired per performance ... but they're not actually salaried or ongoing employees of the organization, said Sasso, making them gig workers, or those who work temporary jobs on an on-demand basis.

Because of the precarious nature of their work, Sasso says drag performers aren't being compensated properly and experience higher rates of physical, verbal, and sexual assault while at work.



# RETAIL SAFETY DURING THE HOLIDAYS AND BEYOND

The busy holiday season is the most important time of year for retail stores. Unfortunately, a recent uptick in retail crime, especially theft, has put retailers on edge. According to the Retail Industry Leaders Association, organized retail crime costs retailers over \$69 billion per year annually causing the loss of thousands of jobs through store closures and reduced hours.

Increasing crime is not only affecting retail profits but the mental health of employees as well. Axon, the technology leader in global public safety, recently surveyed 1,200 retail employees working in security, loss prevention, sales, service, support and more. The majority (51%) of respondents work at a retail business with a street-level storefront. Key findings from the survey include:

In-store workers are exposed to high crime rates:

64% of in-store sales, service, and support retail workers have experienced theft.

47% of in-store retail workers have seen or been the victim of physical or verbal violence on the job.

62% report harm to their mental health caused by violence at work.

Theft is exceptionally high at hardware stores (88%), and violence is most prevalent at discount stores (68%).

# UPEI creates new positions in sexual violence prevention, equity, and student support

The University of Prince Edward Island has created seven new positions with a focus on student support, equity, diversity and inclusion, and sexual violence prevention, six months after a third-party review of workplace harassment and misconduct was released.

The report by Toronto law firm Rubin Thomlinson recommended the university hire more staff to help prevent and respond to issues in those areas.

"This is the beginning. There is lots more to do," interim UPEI president Greg Keefe said in an interview Thursday. Including salary and benefits, the new employees will cost the university more than \$500,000 annually, said Keefe. The province is paying for about two-thirds of that with UPEI picking up the rest, he said.

The Rubin Thomlinson report, released in a redacted form in June 2023, brought to light allegations of sexual violence, bullying, racism and sexism on campus, with both students and staff as victims. It outlined evidence of what it called a toxic workplace culture, especially during the term of former president Alaa Abd-El-Aziz. His sudden retirement in December 2021 came just as a misconduct claim was being filed against him. The third-party review was commissioned a few days later.

# Bravery makes GN whistleblower Nunatsiaq's newsmaker of the year

It takes bravery to stick your neck out and point to bullying and harassment where you work.

That's why Nunatsiaq News picked Jessica Garner, a former Government of Nunavut nurse, its Newsmaker of the Year for 2023.

"Nunavut is scary," Garner said when she went on the record with Nunatsiaq News over the summer about her experience working in the territory.

She worked in health centres in Baker Lake and Gjoa Haven for about a year and a half in 2019 and 2020. But she said the heavy workload, as well as harassment by colleagues and managers, took its toll.

She asked for help and she made suggestions to improve her workplace. In exchange, she said, she was blacklisted from working in the territory.

It wasn't just Baker Lake. She called working in Gjoa Haven "a waking nightmare."

Ultimately, she resigned and in 2022 gave up her nursing licence after eight years.