

March 2023 Environmental Scan

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Expert speaks out on workplace dress codes amid HDSB controversy

Dr. Sarah Saska is the co-founder and CEO of Feminuity, a full service diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) consulting firm.

As the Halton District School Board (HDSB) struggles with calls to provide a dress code for teachers in its schools – stemming from a shop teacher at Oakville Trafalgar High School wearing large prosthetic breasts – Dr. Saska shares some of her thoughts with us on how workplace standards are changing and the challenge facing the local board, which will address the topic again at tonight's meeting.

How is workplace attire changing?

"Expectations around professional dress are changing in many ways. Many organizations, particularly in the tech field and artistic spaces, adopt a more casual dress code that simply bans clothing with hate speech, hate symbols, or offensive language. Beyond more casual workplaces, other offices are creating policies that are more multiculturally inclusive of forms of professional dress throughout the world.

"There has also been a lot of positive change and discussions around inclusivity regarding different hairstyles, hair accessories, and hair textures (e.g. dreadlocks, braids, curls, cornrows, Bantu knots, Afros and headwraps), particularly those common among Black women who have shared experiences of their hair being unfairly stigmatized in professional spaces. There is even proposed legislation to be more inclusive like the CROWN Act in the United States."

Williams Lake nurse suspended for professional misconduct

WILLIAMS LAKE, B.C. — A nurse in Williams Lake has been suspended for inappropriate conduct in the workplace.

In a notice published to its website Wednesday (Mar. 1), the B.C. College of Nurses and Midwives (BCCNM) says the nursing registration belonging to Nwachukwu Enuma has been suspended for three months.

The notice says the issues in question took place in January 2022. They involved “inappropriate conduct with two colleagues that included making comments with sexual content and unwanted touching.”

The college notes there were no concerns raised relating to patient care or communication.

Probe calls for workplace culture change at Trillium Health Partners

Guest: Megan Ogilvie, Health Reporter

Last year, a group of doctors anonymously made serious allegations of abuse of power by hospital leadership at Trillium Health Partners. It triggered an independent investigation and the findings have finally been made public a year later. While the report said there wasn't enough information to substantiate some of the more serious claims, it did lay out a series of recommendations on how to improve the workplace culture. Trillium Health Partners has always strongly disputed these allegations and repeatedly said it welcomed the third-party investigation. We take a look at the timeline of events and what has happened since.

Two former employees of Algerian Consulate in Montreal sue for workplace harassment

Two former cleaning employees of the Algerian Consulate in Montreal are suing the government of Algeria and its Foreign Affairs Department for about \$450,000 in damages and unpaid wages.

Marisa Amaya, 65, and Elida Rivera Lopez, 70, say their experience working at the consulate has left them “psychologically and emotionally broken.”

They are accusing Algerian Consul General Nouredine Meriem and his wife of abuse of power and of humiliating and harassing them on the job.

The women say in separate lawsuits, both of which were filed in August, that the consulate was a “toxic” work environment that led both of them to take sick leave in 2021.

In a written statement, the consulate says it categorically denies all of the women’s allegations, calling them “unfounded and defamatory.”

The allegations have not been proven in court.

Coun. Alex Bierk urges support for provincial law against municipal councillors behaving badly

City council is about to consider supporting a private member's bill at Queen's Park that calls for a provincial law to allow the ouster of municipal council members who behave badly.

Coun. Alex Bierk is putting forward a notice of motion at a general committee meeting on Monday night, asking councillors to consider registering Peterborough's support for Bill 5, the Stopping Harassment and Abuse by Local Leaders Act.

City councillors can currently lose their seats in certain cases of conflict of interest. But councils can only dock a councillor's pay to punish them for other bad behaviour — not oust them.

Bill 5 is a new private member's bill from Orleans MPP Stephen Blais aiming to make it possible for city council members in Ontario to lose their seats over breach of their municipality's workplace harassment policies.

Blais was on Ottawa city council from 2010 until 2020, before running for MPP in Orleans.

He told CBC last year that his bill was inspired by a colleague on council who'd harassed city staff in Ottawa.

2 B.C. nurses disciplined for sexual harassment

Two nurses in B.C. have been suspended due to workplace sexual harassment, according to public notices from the professional regulator.

The British Columbia College of Nurses and Midwives published summaries of consent agreements between its inquiry committee and two registered nurses on March 1.

In the first case, Nwachukwu Enuma, from Williams Lake was suspended for three months for "inappropriate conduct" that occurred in January of 2022, the agreement summary says.

"(It) included making comments with sexual content and unwanted touching," the notice continues, adding that "there were no concerns about patient communication or care raised."

In addition to the suspension, Enuma has agreed to undergo "remedial education" on workplace ethics and harassment.

In the second case, Matthew Danchak, from Kamloops was suspended for one month due to "conduct issues" that arose in March of 2022

Ontario service workers say they were fired for speaking out about unsafe conditions

Three developmental service workers in the community of Alliston are alleging they were fired for raising concerns about a what they claim is a dangerous work environment at the Community Living Association of South Simcoe (CLASS).

In December 2022, the union representing the workers, OPSEU, told reporters Local 332 members had reported multiple physical and verbal assaults while supporting individuals in the community living facility.

Following that date, local union president and direct support professional Allan May said he, the union's treasurer and a joint health and safety representative were let go from their jobs on Feb. 1.

"Yes, we work with developmental disabilities, getting spit on, kicked and punched. We know we get that, and we're trained with non-violent crisis intervention, so that's good, but they seem to be increasing, and we just can't keep up — a lot of concussions, a broken nose, a lot of violence happening," May said in an interview.

In December, the union had said incidents of workplace violence resulted in concussions, stitches, broken bones and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Making sure everyone belongs at the City of Ottawa

After consulting with staff about their experiences of racism in the workplace, the City of Ottawa took the findings to heart and did something. In June 2022, Council approved the City's first anti-racism strategy – a five-year plan with an important vision: Systemic racism and discrimination will no longer be barriers to safety, resources and opportunities.

“The organization always had zero tolerance,” says Suzanne Obiorah, director of the Gender and Race Equity, Inclusion, Indigenous Relations and Social Development Service Area, which is part of the Community and Social Services Department. “The challenge is that barriers, as a result of that systemic racism, are oftentimes deeply entrenched, nuanced and very complex. The strategy allows for an intentional proactive approach to identify and remove barriers to ensure inclusion and full participation of all staff.”

Part of the strategy involves training and various learning opportunities, helping staff at all levels understand anti-racism principles and identify the barriers. One aspect of the robust strategy is to help remove bias in the hiring process and advance the representation of Indigenous, Black and other racialized staff in the City's increasingly diverse workforce.

Jacklyn St. Laurent, a psychotherapist of Haitian descent, joined the City as an anti-racism specialist last year. One of her jobs is to look at existing policies to make sure they're inclusive, as well as to create learning modules that address racial biases.

New website offers support to women who are survivors of sexual harassment

The #metoo movement has given birth to a spinoff in Canada: The #aftermetoo website.

The site, officially launched Wednesday in Toronto, was created by a Canadian charity to help people experiencing sexual harassment on the job. It provides tough love alongside support and resources.

“People who are supposed to protect you probably won’t,” proclaims the site which was funded in part by the Canadian Women’s Foundation and sponsored by various organizations including APTN.

“That’s a harsh reality, but knowing the truth about your options will help you get out of this OK.”

The information is there to guide survivors in their fight – whether they take it to the authorities or not, said Aftermetoo managing director Sue Gardner.

“We made this for people experiencing workplace sexual harassment in Canada.”

While #metoo is credited with giving survivors a voice, #aftermetoo is designed to aid them after they speak up.

“Something bad happened to you and it’s not your fault,” said the site. “Sexual harassment happens to people literally every day. You don’t deserve it.”

Mill Local President sets positive precedent with bargaining of Women's Advocate language

For Bob Lederer, creating bargaining Women's Advocate language at his workplace's collective agreement was personal.

In 2004, he was a new worker at the paper mill at Resolute Forest Products in Thunder Bay. At that time, the mill was not unionized. He and his co-workers wore headsets for communication and one particular interaction made him aware of the sexism in the heavily male-dominated workforce.

"I remember the acting supervisor ordering the sister to come up on the catwalk – over the radio for everyone to hear – and told her to come undo his pants. Everyone went quiet," he said.

"I always remembered that story for two reasons – I was just shocked by it, and I had a daughter at home."

The woman worker laughed it off, recalled Lederer, now President of Local 5025. But the interaction was clearly inappropriate.

In 2015, when the local elected its bargaining committee, all eight members, plus the National Representative were men – with less than six to eight women working in the plant at the time. That's when a lightbulb came on in Lederer's head to bargain a Women's Advocate position in the next collective agreement.

Designing a workplace where trans leaders can thrive

Béatrice Robichaud, co-founder and vice president of marketing and customer experience at Québec City-based Panthera Dental, refers to herself as a “Jane of all trades.”

While her co-founder and brother Gabriel tackles the CEO role at their dental device company, she liaises with the company’s clients, assists with new product development and speaks at industry events around the world about technology and dental products.

As well, Ms. Robichaud talks publicly about what it’s like to be a leader who’s also a transgender woman – often through events held by Fondation Émergence, a Montreal-based non-profit that works to fight homophobia and transphobia.

When she transitioned six years ago, Ms. Robichaud says she found few role models. She wondered, “Am I the only one?” Slowly, she realized that there were more trans business leaders out there, but some were afraid of coming out publicly.

Ms. Robichaud says she decided to speak about her experience to show that it’s possible to be a successful trans woman leader, even in male-dominated industries. She shares the message that embracing her true self helped her excel at work.

Non-disclosure deals should not hide harassment: B.C. Greens

The B.C. Greens tabled a bill Thursday to make it illegal for employers and other organizations to misuse non-disclosure agreements in cases of harassment or discrimination.

Whereas NDAs were designed to prohibit the sharing of trade secrets, the B.C. Greens say they've instead become tools to silence victims of workplace discrimination and harassment, including sexual harassment and racism.

“This is a pervasive issue across the province, and around the world, and it’s time that British Columbia steps up to make our workplaces a safer, more transparent place for everyone, especially those who are most vulnerable,” said Sonia Furstenau, leader of the B.C. Greens and MLA for Cowichan Valley.

She called on the premier to support the bill.

The Canadian Bar Association recently passed a resolution seeking to prevent the misuse of NDAs in harassment and discrimination cases.

Nishnawbe Aski Nation chiefs vote to suspend Grand Chief amid allegations

TORONTO – Derek Fox, the Grand Chief of Nishnawbe Aski Nation is facing suspension after being accused of workplace harassment and violating the executive code of conduct.

Derek Fox, who leads the Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN), was suspended with pay by the organization's executive council last month pending a code-of-conduct investigation.

On Thursday, an emergency meeting of NAN chiefs was held in Toronto to discuss his fate. The chiefs voted to uphold his suspension and appoint an interim Grand Chief until the investigation is completed.

However, Mr. Fox refused to accept the decision and left the meeting wearing his headdress. He reportedly told a photographer outside: "Still the Grand Chief. You can write that."

Fox's lawyer, Rebecca Amoah, said in a statement that Mr. Fox was denied the opportunity to address the chiefs and defend himself against the allegations. She also questioned the validity of the motion, saying that many chiefs were absent or represented by proxies and that there was no quorum.

Threats, violence and abuse: CUPE report shows unsafe conditions of Sask. library workers

When you think of a job where a large portion of employees experience verbal abuse, violence, sexual harassment and threats, librarian might not be the one that first comes to mind.

But the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) released a report Thursday showing employees in some of Saskatchewan's public libraries are facing unacceptable levels of workplace violence.

About 15 per cent of the library workers CUPE represents took part in the survey, which happened to be mostly Regina and Saskatoon staff members, but out of those staff members:

- 78 per cent reported having experienced verbal abuse
- 71 per cent reported witnessing violence
- 50 per cent reported experiencing violence
- 44 per cent reported experiencing sexual harassment
- 40 per cent reported being threatened with physical harm.

“This report makes it clear that public library workers across the province are facing unacceptable incidents of harassment, abuse and violence in their workplaces,” said Judy Henley, president of CUPE Saskatchewan.

A fifth of older employees experiencing deliberate exclusion at work: survey

Roughly a fifth (19 per cent) of employees aged 55 and older say they've experienced deliberate exclusion in the workplace, according to a new survey by CareerWallet.

By comparison, it found just 10 per cent of employees aged 25 and younger said they've experienced exclusionary behaviour at work.

In addition, nearly a third (32 per cent) of employees aged 55 and older said they experience some form of bullying in the workplace, which was higher than any other age group. Other disturbing experiences cited by older workers include inappropriate comments (24 per cent), offensive comments (19 per cent) and sexist behaviour (13 per cent).

“Our new workplace survey highlights that older employees are not only getting ignored and excluded, but are also experiencing bullying from colleagues and managers,” said Craig Bines, chief executive officer of the CareerWallet Group, in a press release. “This shows a fundamental cultural problem within [many] businesses that simply aren't utilizing the most experienced and valuable employees or giving them the respect they deserve.”

CHRC found to have discriminated against Black, racialized workers

The government body that was supposed to protect workers from discrimination has, itself, discriminated against its own Black and racialized workers.

That's according to the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) in a recent decision regarding the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC).

The decision found that discrimination and systemic racism occurred and has invited the parties involved to engage in mediation to seek a meaningful resolution, said the Association of Justice Counsel (AJC), which represents government lawyers.

“As we have maintained from the onset of this matter, the CHRC has an important leadership role to play in setting the standards for eliminating systemic racism, as an organization that is mandated to protect all Canadians against discrimination,” it said.

“If the CHRC is to maintain the trust and confidence of Canadians to protect them from systemic racism, then it must first look inwards and reform its approach in addition to its internal practices. Prevention is essential.”

Survey on work place violence in libraries not surprising, says union

The union representing library workers in Saskatchewan's largest cities said it was prompted to survey its members on work place violence after increasing reports from members to the union about violent incidents and overdoses.

The survey indicated that the respondents experienced verbal abuse, witnessed or experienced violence, experienced sexual harassment or were threatened with physical harm.

In a press release, the union president called the incidents "unacceptable."

"The workers are experiencing violence in the work place but it's not just workers we're concerned about, we're also concerned about the public that access libraries because they could also be exposed to this," Judy Henley said Friday.

The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) had 101 public library workers in Sask. (about 15.5 per cent of CUPE's library sector membership) answer an online survey between June 29 and Sept. 9, 2022.

Compensation for sexual assaults 'could well be a challenge,' King's College president says

In the wake of a report documenting allegations of sexual abuse and assault by a former University of King's College professor, the school has said some of the victims may be entitled to compensation.

But how does that compensation process work? Who pays the settlements? How much might they be? And how might the payouts affect King's financially?

Wayne John Hankey, a longtime professor at King's and neighbouring Dalhousie University in Halifax, was charged in 2021 with sexual assault, gross indecency and indecent assault for incidents involving three male complainants alleged to have occurred between 1977 and 1988.

Hankey died in 2022 before any of the cases went to trial.

King's hired Toronto law firm Rubin Thomlinson to investigate and produce a final report, which was released Wednesday and which details many other incidents not encompassed by the criminal complaints.

‘A pattern of predatory behaviour’: King’s shares damning review into Wayne Hankey sexual assault accusations

More than a year after former University of King’s College professor Wayne Hankey was set to stand trial in the first of three sexual assault cases brought against him, an independent report commissioned by the university he spent his career at finds the professor not only showed a “pattern of predatory and abusive behaviour” throughout his career at King’s, but that King’s itself bears responsibility for allowing that behaviour to happen.

The 51-page report, prepared by law firm Rubin Thomlinson and released today, finds that Hankey’s behaviour during his 40-year career at King’s “ranged from subtle solicitation, sexual suggestion, [and] homophobic remarks, to sexual assault.” The report further finds that “most of” Hankey’s behaviour was connected to his employment at King’s—and that the university’s response after becoming aware of the numerous allegations surrounding Hankey “was lacking.” In drawing those conclusions, the report points to one instance of the King’s administration destroying a report into Hankey’s misconduct. It also surfaces more than a dozen new allegations brought against the disgraced former professor.

Sask. library workers report increased workplace violence

The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) just released a report showing that public library workers in Saskatchewan, including at Southeast Regional Library (Weyburn), face increasing levels of verbal abuse, violence and harassment in their workplace.

The report was initiated in response to a growing number of violent incidents occurring in Saskatchewan public libraries.

A total of 101 public library workers participated in CUPE's Workplace, Violence and Harassment online survey. The anonymous survey was carried out from June 29th, 2022 to September 9th, 2022.

Of those that responded, 78% reported that they have experienced verbal abuse (yelling, swearing, racist comments, offensive remarks) in their workplace, 44% reported experiencing some sexual harassment, 50% reported experiencing workplace violence, and 40% of respondents said that they have been threatened by physical harm while at work.

Company's VP cries 'favouritism' and bullying among executives

In a recent appeal, the Workers' Compensation Appeal Tribunal (WCAT) in B.C. looked at whether an employer committed a "prohibited action" when it terminated the services of its VP Sales.

In a December 2021 decision, the province's Workers' Compensation Board found that the VP Sales had made out a case of prohibited action. The Board further found that the employer had failed to rebut that case. Consequently, the Board concluded that the employer had engaged in prohibited action contrary to the WCA.

The employer disagreed with the Board's decision and appealed to the tribunal.

Conflicts with other executives

The employer sells household wares, including cooking products. The employer contracts with many independent contractors to sell the employer's product. These independent contractors are referred to as the "field," and it is they who locate customers and re-sell the employer's products to those customers.

'Violence is a workplace hazard for teachers': Parents, expert concerned about rising violence in N.S. schools

The stabbing at Charles P. Allen High School (CPA) in Bedford, N.S., is hitting many parents hard.

“We don't want them going to school worrying about, ‘Am I going to get stabbed today? Am I going to get jumped today?’” says parent Tamara Beazley.

That fear has been the top of Beazley's mind long before a 15-year-old student at CPA was charged with stabbing two school staff members after the incident at the school Monday morning.

She went public with her own story last fall, after her teenage son was bullied and intimidated at his high school and allegedly threatened with students wielding knives.

No charges were ever laid in the incident, and Beazley says school administrators didn't take it seriously.

She's among a several parents who have told CTV News that students at some schools won't use school bathrooms for fear of getting jumped.