

Provincial business blitzes coming

By Sarah Sobanski

Area small businesses should be prepared for the province to check that they're following new employment legislation in the coming months.

Starting June 1 and running until Sept. 28, the province will bring its **2018-'19 inspection** blitzes to Bancroft and surrounding area. Small retailers and grocers will be targeted for upholding employment standards including minimum wage, hours of work, overtime pay, public holidays and paid vacation ? many of which saw changes with Bill 148.

?During an inspection, employment standards officers check for compliance with the Employment Standards Act and take enforcement activity as appropriate,? communications spokesperson for the province Janet Deline told *Bancroft This Week*. She noted employers are responsible for being compliant.

But Niche! project manager Lee Bay, who consults with more than 30 area businesses, said the business community is handling changes from the bill ?reactively.?

?No one is having time to sit down and say well how are we going to roll this out, it's oh, we have no choice but to roll this out,? she said.

She expressed concern that those who didn't have their ?ducks in a row? already would fall behind or implement changes in an unsustainable way. She said the negative response to the bill hadn't changed.

?They're having to adapt financially. Until they see what their quarterly financials look like, they really don't know what the whole impact has been,? said Bay. ?I would say that people are still not happy with the entire situation but when you don't have a choice in it you just tolerate it. So I guess tolerance would be the word that I use to describe how people are feeling.?

According to the province's blitzes schedule, employment standards officers focus on sectors where ?there's a history of violations, vulnerable workers are employed such as new and young workers, temporary foreign workers and workers in non-standard or precarious work, and the number of people working is on the rise.?

?While the ministry views inspection blitzes as an opportunity to educate employers about their responsibilities, provide them with resources and refer them to tools to help them with compliance,? said Deline. ?Employers may want to consider seeking advice from lawyers who specialize in employment law or human resources professionals to ensure that their policies and practices are up to date including changes as a result of Bill 148.?

Bay said if the ministry is focusing the blitzes as an ?education directive than [it's] doing it properly.?

?It would have been nice to have this in advance of taking effect but at least there is a sense that they are trying to educate first. If that's the case then it will make everybody a lot happier,? she said.

She encouraged businesses to take time and read through what is expected of them ?in advance of the ministry showing up on their doorsteps.?

?It could be an easy fix for them and they don't want any surprises,? she said.

Deline said, ?Employers who have questions about the ESA may also visit the ministry's website for information about the recent changes at [Ontario.ca/ESAGuide](#) or call the Employment Standards Information Centre for help at 1?800?531?5551 toll?free.?

Since the spring of 2005, the province has seen ?more than \$177 million in wages and other money owed to employees has been recovered through inspections, claims, collections and other program activities,? according to its announcement.