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Forced labour in trucking? New initiative tackles hidden crisis in Manitoba

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A new initiative has been launched to address labour trafficking in Manitoba's trucking industry, an issue that advocacy groups say has been occurring in plain sight.

The initiative, announced on ***Manitoba Human Trafficking Awareness Day*** (March 13), is being led by The Joy Smith Foundation in partnership with the Manitoba Trucking Association and Winnipeg Crime Stoppers. The goal is to raise awareness about labour trafficking in the trucking industry and provide resources for recognizing and reporting suspected cases.

LABOUR TRAFFICKING IN THE TRUCKING INDUSTRY

Labour trafficking occurs when individuals are forced to work under exploitative conditions, often with little or no pay, and in some cases, without the necessary training or qualifications for the job.

According to the Manitoba Trucking Association, the trucking industry has seen cases where new drivers have been subjected to unfair treatment, highlighting the sector's vulnerabilities to labour exploitation.

"Unfortunately, labour trafficking is a serious concern in our industry," the Manitoba Trucking Association said in a statement. "Many new drivers are forced into unsafe working conditions without proper training or necessary skills. Those who condone these practices compromise human rights, labour standards, and safety."

RAISING AWARENESS AND REPORTING TRAFFICKING

The initiative will focus on educating trucking professionals, company leaders, and the public about recognizing the signs of labour trafficking. It will also provide guidance on how to report suspicious activity safely and anonymously. Winnipeg Crime Stoppers, a partner in the initiative, will offer cash rewards for tips leading to the arrest of human traffickers.

“By collaborating our efforts, we strengthen our shared commitment to protecting vulnerable individuals and making our communities safer,” said a spokesperson for Winnipeg Crime Stoppers.

A BROADER ISSUE

While the initiative focuses on trucking, labour trafficking occurs in multiple industries across Canada. It often targets vulnerable individuals, including newcomers seeking employment. The initiative builds on prior efforts, such as The Joy Smith Foundation’s 2023 campaign against sex trafficking, and aims to shed light on a form of human trafficking that experts say often goes unnoticed.

“Labour trafficking has been hidden in plain sight for too long,” said Joy Smith, a former Member of Parliament and founder of the Joy Smith Foundation. “We’re taking a crucial first step in exposing this crime, but real change requires everyone to be involved.”

The campaign will include resources to help the public and industry professionals identify and report suspected cases of labour trafficking. Winnipeg Crime Stoppers is offering cash rewards for tips leading to the arrest of traffickers, while the Manitoba Trucking Association has pledged to work with the foundation to combat exploitative practices within the industry.