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## **Campaign tries to reach exploited workers in Manitoba trucking industry**

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Labour trafficking in Manitoba's trucking sector is running rampant and remains mostly unreported, human rights groups and industry leaders said as they launched an effort to combat it.

The Joy Smith Foundation, which supports people who have been victimized by sex trafficking and forced labour, along with the Manitoba Trucking Association and Winnipeg Crime Stoppers will launch a public information campaign to inform people about the signs of labour trafficking and how to report a crime. They made the announcement Thursday, which is Manitoba Human Trafficking Awareness Day.

Victims of forced labour in Canada's trucking industry are often from other countries. Traffickers force them to work in violation of human rights and labour laws, and they face threats and coercion. Sometimes, their passports are taken.

Despite these crimes being equated to a form of modern-day slavery by human rights groups and hundreds of suspected victims, Crime Stoppers chair Robert MacKenzie said forced labour cases in the industry are not just under-reported, but often "not reported at all."

"It's extremely prominent here," he said.

"Survivors and victims are reaching out to the different organizations, and they've been attempting to try to determine how they can get help and what they can do and what resources are available."

Many of the international workers caught in the scourge arrive in Manitoba under the Labour Market Impact Assessment program, which employers use to hire temporary foreign workers, said Janet Campbell, president and CEO of the foundation.

In Manitoba, 39 per cent of the trucking firms that participated in the program from 2019 to 2023 are no longer considered legally operational, meaning there is no way to keep track of the safety of hundreds of foreign workers, as per data provided by the foundation.

Companies with fewer than 15 trucks were especially reliant on foreign labour, with the average company hiring almost double their fleet size through the program's permit system.

Many workers understand they are being exploited and may not believe there are resources for them to get help, said Campbell.

"Basically, they are kind of tricked into, 'Oh, you have to pay for this,' and 'Oh, you have to work this way,'" she said.

She said they fear losing their job or being deported. Often, they are threatened.

"It is something that really holds them back from actually believing that they're being perpetrated on as a crime, and they don't know how to get out of these situations."

The awareness campaign will include material in different languages and will focus on how to report cases anonymously through Crime Stoppers.