

Ontario Further Expands its Workplace Inspections Campaign to Combat COVID-19

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By Daniel Wong, John Wilkinson, and Max Skrow

Last week, the Ontario government announced that it would be ramping up workplace inspections to combat the rising number of COVID-19 cases in the province.^[1] The government's weekend "blitz" targeted big-box retailers and revealed that only 69% of the 240 businesses inspected were complying with COVID safety precautions.^[2] As a result, a number of non-compliant businesses received tickets.

Following the "success" of last weekend's investigations, the Ontario government is expanding its workplace investigation program. Effective January 20, 2021, more than 300 bylaw and police officers will be visiting workplaces that remain open under Ontario's current lockdown restrictions, which include:

- retail establishments, including big box stores;
- restaurants open for takeout;
- essential service establishments (e.g., gas stations); and
- farming operations.

In our last article, we predicted that the government might expand its investigation program into other industries. Now that the government has begun to do just that, it is important for employers to implement policies and practices that comply with the current public health requirements.

Businesses can be fined \$1,000 for failing to comply with the orders under the *Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act* and the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act*. All individuals, including employees and patrons, can also be liable for a fine of \$750 for failing to comply with orders under the acts. For more serious instances of non-compliance, under each act, if convicted, the court can impose fines up to \$100,000 for individuals, and directors and officers of a corporation can be fined up to \$500,000. Both could also receive terms of imprisonment of up to one year. A corporation that is convicted of an offence under either act is liable for a fine of up to \$10,000,000.

WeirFoulds' employment law group is monitoring these developments and will be providing updates as the COVID-19 situation progresses. For more information on how to respond to COVID-19 in your workplace or organization, please contact [Daniel Wong](#), [John Wilkinson](#) or [Max Skrow](#).

[1] <https://www.weirfoulds.com/ontario-ramps-up-workplace-inspections-to-combat-covid-19>

[2] <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/60019/ontario-expands-workplace-enforcement-campaigns>

The information and comments herein are for the general information of the reader and are not intended as advice or opinion to be relied upon in relation to any particular circumstances. For particular application of the law to specific situations, the reader should seek professional advice.

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