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LOCAL : NEWS

Health inspectors committed to enforcing Reopening Ontario Act in Kawartha Lakes, Northumberland

Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit laid 17 charges against individuals and businesses between Jan. 21 and Oct. 15

By **Catherine Whitnall** Reporter

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Despite the significant pressures placed on public health inspectors' workloads, the local health unit continues to enforce the provincial Reopening Ontario Act regulations.

Between Jan. 21 and Oct. 15, the Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit laid 17 charges against individuals and businesses for violating the Act as well as three charges under the Health Protection and Promotions Act (HPPA) against individuals for not isolating as required.

"Unfortunately, we do get businesses that do not agree with compliance orders," said manager of health protection Bernie Mayer, noting enforcement is used as a last resort after other progressive measures, including engagement, explanations and education, fail.

He added there have been ongoing meetings and collaborations with various agencies, including municipal bylaw and police, to ensure everyone is interpreting the legislation in the same manner.

Under Part 1 of the Provincial Offences Act, failing to comply with an order made during a declared emergency could result in a fine of \$750 plus surcharges. Individuals can also be fined \$1,000 plus surcharges for "obstructing any person exercising a power in accordance with an order made during a declared emergency."

Mayer noted, while the above fines may not appear to be a deterrent, further violations can be quite costly. Failing to require each patron who enters a business to provide proof of identification and full vaccination could result in fines ranging from \$10,000 to \$100,000 plus up to one year in jail.

In addition to the charges, Mayer said 33 formal warnings have been issued for non-compliance with masking and proof of vaccination requirements and 145 warning letters have been issued under Section 22 in respect to violating orders related to COVID-19.

While it has become a regular part of public health inspector duties across the province, Mayer noted local staff would be happier not having to enforce the laws.

Mayer said doing so has put significant pressures on staff workload as additional time is required to collect evidence and co-ordinate with external enforcement partners, co-ordinate service of tickets and/or summons, which includes meeting with justices of the peace to serve summons and file documents with courts, prepare evidence for court procedures and preparing for, and attending, court for those that opt to have a trial instead of pleading guilty and paying the fine.

Detailed information regarding charges under the Reopening Ontario Act are posted on the health unit's website at www.hkpr.on.ca/2021/10/13/reopening-ontario-act-enforcement-activities/ and updated on a regular basis to provide additional information including any resulting convictions in court.