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Union to Halton Hills two-hatter firefighters: Quit or else

By Graeme Frisque
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Four part-time Halton Hills firefighters have been told to quit by their full-time union or face a number of penalties including ejection from its ranks.

Brian Babcock, Rick Vranic, Greg Waller and Mike Wilde are full-time firefighters in Mississauga, who also worked part-time in Halton Hills – a practice known in firefighting circles as two hatting.

The practice, while widespread in smaller communities, is strictly forbidden under the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) union constitution.

As a result, after being discovered, the four men faced a tribunal last month by their local union chapter – the Mississauga Fire Fighters Association.

The three-person tribunal handed down its findings at the beginning of February and found the four men guilty of misconduct of the International Association Constitution and Bylaws, Article XV, Section 1 (N).

The tribunal levied a number of penalties, some pursuant on continued violation of the rules. In other words, the worst of the penalties are only binding if the four men continue to work part-time in Halton Hills.

Three of the accused were immediately suspended from the union until they resigned from their part-time jobs. The union ruling confirmed at least one of the four firefighters (Babcock) tendered his resignation to the Halton Hills Fire Department prior to the ruling, whereby avoiding suspension.

According to IAFF district vice-president Fred LeBlanc, suspension from the union can lead to loss of employment based on contract rules in many municipalities re-

quiring union membership as a condition of employment.

In addition to the suspension and resulting lost benefits, all four men will face fines of \$500 recurring for six months for a total fine of \$3,500 each. According to the tribunal ruling, should the three holdouts continue to violate the ruling after six months, the monthly fine will increase to \$1,000. It will then increase to a monthly amount of \$1,500 after a year, and finally up to \$2,000 per month should the violation persist after 18 months.

The Trial Board unanimously supports the fees and penalties to the guilty parties. The financial penalty was not intended to fully cover the expense of the trial, but to act as a deterrent, wrote the tribunal board in its findings.

As previously reported by The IFP, according to a source within the department, the trial was causing dissension among the ranks of the department as some felt the Town of Halton Hills was not standing up for its people.

Caledon FD is going through a similar situation, however the difference being is that the Town of Caledon has rallied behind their firefighters and is not only providing emotional support, but has committed to paying legal fees and fines for their two-hatters. The Town of Halton Hills has turned its back on ours and they have been hung out to dry, said the source.

Halton Hills fire chief John deHooze explained the reason the town was not supporting their two hatters like Caledon was because Halton Hills does not require them and is in the process of phasing-out its remaining two hatters through attrition as part of a multi-year plan.

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