

## BUSINESS

# Cab owners may face workplace warning

By: **Martin Cash**

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THE Manitoba Taxicab Board is trying to stamp out alleged workplace irregularities affecting taxi drivers who do not own their own cab licences.

The provincial taxi industry regulator is to rule on hundreds of new licence applications this week, but industry insiders say they do not believe the provincial regulator is going to grant many -- if any -- new licences.

But the most important changes in the industry could come in the area of worker rights.

The recent surge in new licence applications has in part been spearheaded by the attempted formation of a taxi drivers' co-op to counteract what they say have been abuses that hired drivers have had to endure for many years.

A major study on the Winnipeg taxi business by consultant Ray Mundy and the Tennessee Transportation & Logistics Foundation (TTLF) made reference to some of those allegations.

They include: no overtime pay, even though drivers are forced to work a minimum of 60 hours a week; no holiday pay; no employment insurance or Canada Pension Plan remittances; no medical or dental coverage; concerns about unsafe vehicles; a lack of proper termination notice; inability to access Workers Compensation Board claims; and several other complaints.

The taxicab board does not have a mandate to deal with workplace disputes, but board secretary Jerry Kozubal acknowledged that it was aware of the allegations.

Winnipeg's two largest taxi companies, Unicity and Duffy's, do not hire drivers themselves. Individual licence owners hire drivers and establish their own arrangements with those they take on.

Kozubal said recent consultations with industry stakeholders led to the province's employment standards branch being contacted to establish educational communications with owners and drivers.

"The issue has come up before and we figure one clear option to deal with this is to make it clear to both employers and employees what their rights and responsibilities are," said Kozubal. "We have asked the employment standards branch if they would provide some kind of documentation that would clearly show employers if they hire someone, here's what they are responsible for."

Terri Proulx of SEED Winnipeg, the organization that has been working to form the Winnipeg Taxi Co-op on behalf of more than 150 drivers who do not own their own plates, is encouraged by the initiative.

"Something has to change," she said. "We're happy that the taxicab board is taking this action."

A spokesman for the employment standards branch said the discussions are at a preliminary stage.

"But we are comfortable that we will be able to do something," the employment standards official said.

Over the last several months, the taxicab board has received applications for 805 new licences.

The board subsequently commissioned a report on the industry from the TTLF, made public last month. Among other things, it said the city could use more cars during the winter months, but is probably adequately served by the current complement of taxis on the streets.

While the Taxicab Board has not ruled on any of the 805 applications for regular taxis, over the last few months it has approved 38 licences for accessible taxicabs, handicab vans, limousines and executive cars.

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