

RCMP  
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### Red Deer couple charged with human trafficking at central Alberta hotel

By Melissa Ramsay and Karen Bartko  
Global News

**WATCH ABOVE:** An investigation into the working conditions of temporary foreign workers began last summer, and new charges of human trafficking have been laid against a Red Deer couple, Kendra Szagolski reports.

**CALGARY** – A Red Deer man and woman have been charged with human trafficking, in connection with the alleged abuse of eight temporary foreign workers at a central Alberta hotel. The alleged victims were employed at an Econo Lodge in Red Deer County's Gasoline Alley.

An employee at a liquor store attached to the hotel said the man and woman are married, and are nowhere to be found right now.

Varinder Sidhu, 49, and 46-year-old Ravinder Sidhu, who goes by the name Ruby, are each facing three charges in the alleged forced labour situation. The charges are:

- Organizing the coming into Canada of one or more persons by means of abduction, fraud, deception or use or threat of force or coercion
- Employing a foreign national in a capacity in which the foreign national is not authorized to be employed
- Counselling, inducing, aiding or directing or attempting to counsel, aid or alter any person to directly or indirectly misrepresent or withhold material facts relating to a relevant matter that induces or could induce an error in the administration of this Act is guilty of an offence.



A 10-month investigation was launched in June 2014 when Alberta Employment Standards, a division of the province's Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour ministry, contacted RCMP. The two agencies conducted a joint investigation, which led to charges being laid in early April.

"Human traffickers exploit the most vulnerable people in society, such as migrant workers, and they prey on despair and desperation," says RCMP Insp. Darcy Flurry.

Police added there are several ongoing investigations across Alberta regarding this type of forced work situation.

Barrister Harrison with Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour said the province has no role in enforcing or laying immigration-related charges, since it is a federal matter. He said the couple was fined following the Employment Standards investigation.

"In this particular case, the employee had been ordered to pay seven employees more than \$83,000 in earnings determined to be owing to them, plus more than \$8,000 in Order of Officer Fees. I understand that Econo Lodge Inns and Suites submitted payment of \$91,621.83 yesterday," Harrison said. He explained the amount included compensation for unpaid wages and unpaid overtime.

"It's not unique, but it is substantial."

"We have employment standards laws for a reason," Harrison added. "We like to think all employees are paying their staff properly, again whether that's temporary foreign workers or the rest of us, it doesn't matter. We all have rights in the workplace."

The accused were charged April 3 but are not in police custody. The pair is scheduled to appear in Red Deer Provincial Court on May 26, 2015.

With files from Kendra Szagolski, Global News

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