

Ontario stopped enforcing credentials in skilled trades, right after Doug Ford took power

Provincial inspectors aren't checking if mechanics, electricians, other skilled tradespeople are certified



[Mike Crawley](#) · CBC News · Posted: Jul 21, 2021 4:00 AM ET | Last Updated: July 21, 2021



Ontario has not been enforcing its rules on compulsory licensing in skilled trades, such as auto servicing. 'I'm a stickler for rules. And I would love everybody to be

forced to play by the rules as well,' said Lou Trottier, owner of All About Imports, a garage in Mississauga, Ont. (Mike Crawley/CBC)

For three years running, Ontario has not enforced its rules requiring tradespeople — such as electricians, auto mechanics and plumbers — to be certified, CBC News has learned.

Enforcement of Ontario's compulsory certification of licensed trades ground to a halt right after Premier Doug Ford's government took office.

It means that since the middle of 2018, there has been no provincial oversight of whether the people working in Ontario's licensed trades actually have the credentials to do the work.

"It's like having an environmental act with no enforcement," said Patrick Dillon, business manager of the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council, a grouping of labour unions.

"You can't have a trades qualification act and compulsory licensed trades and not have enforcement," said Dillon in an interview.



Electricians and electrical apprentices must be registered with the Ontario College of Trades to carry out work in the province. (Submitted by Andrea Davidson)

The lack of enforcement affects not just tradespeople, but also potentially anyone who hires an electrician, a plumber or a mechanic.

"You as a consumer pay a premium dollar to have your car serviced," said Lou Trottier, owner of All About Imports, an auto service garage in Mississauga, Ont. "If you find out it was done by an unqualified, unlicensed person, it kind of leaves a bad taste in your mouth, doesn't it?"

The mandate to enforce the province's skilled trades certification rules lies with the Ontario College of Trades (OCOT), an agency created in 2009.

Ford made a campaign promise to scrap the college, describing it as burdensome red tape for businesses. His government passed legislation in the fall of 2018 to begin winding it down.

However, OCOT still exists and was supposed to continue carrying out its core duties, including enforcing credentials in the trades where licensing is compulsory.



Ontario Labour Minister Monte McNaughton says OCOT inspectors have taken on 'an educational role' since the Progressive Conservative government took office. (Mike Crawley/CBC)

Ontario requires certification in [23 licensed trades](#), including electricians, plumbers, crane operators, refrigeration technicians, hairstylists and a whole range of automotive work, such as brakes, transmission and auto body repair.

It's illegal to practice any of those trades in Ontario without the proper certification. It's also illegal for an employer to hire someone who isn't authorized to perform the work of those trades.

"One of the main responsibilities of the college is to ensure that individuals performing the skills of compulsory trades have the training and certification required to legally practise this trade in Ontario," says a current statement on the OCOT website.

There is little evidence the agency has carried out that responsibility over the past three years.

College inspectors found more than 4,200 people working without proper authorization in the licensed trades in each of 2015 and 2016, the last full years for which figures are available.

Yet since June 28, 2018, the day before the Ford government was sworn in, there is not a single [notice of contravention](#) posted on OCOT's website. There are also zero [Provincial Offences Act convictions](#) posted since July 2018.



Ontario requires certification in 23 licensed trades, including hairstylists, plumbers, crane operators, refrigeration technicians and a whole range of automotive work. (Andrew Lee/CBC)

Before the Ford government was elected, college enforcement officers made thousands of visits annually to construction sites, automotive garages and body shops to validate the credentials of skilled tradespeople.

Government officials admit enforcement stopped, even though the law remained in place.

"Since we formed government, OCOT inspectors have taken an educational role," said Ryan Whealy, acting press secretary for Monte McNaughton, the minister of labour, training and skills development, in a statement.

"We heard loud and clear from workers and management that OCOT, including its enforcement, was deeply politicized and ineffective," said Whealy.

The lack of enforcement over the past three years is a source of frustration for tradespeople who continue to pay their mandatory annual fees to remain licensed in Ontario. The \$120 fee was reduced to \$60 in 2019.

Dillon characterizes it as a sort of legalized theft. "When you're paying for something and you're not getting it, that is just a breach of the contract," he said.



Before he became premier of Ontario, Doug Ford campaigned on a promise to abolish the College of Trades, the body that regulates skilled trades in the province. (Tijana Martin/The Canadian Press)

He acknowledges there may have previously been problems with enforcement, but argues that those problems "should have been fixed rather than blowing up the college."

Trottier said the lack of enforcement irritates him. "I play by the rules. I'm a stickler for rules. And I would love everybody to be forced to play by the rules as well," he said.

The Ford government recently announced the Ontario College of Trades will be replaced effective Jan. 1, 2022 with a new Crown agency called Skilled Trades Ontario.

The [legislation for the new agency](#) shows that certification will remain mandatory in the designated trades, and McNaughton promises it will be enforced.



In October 2018, shortly after the Ford government announced it would wind down the Ontario College of Trades, Unifor representatives were among the labour groups speaking out against the plan. (Dale Molnar/CBC)

"As we move forward this summer, we'll ensure that the compliance and enforcement regulations are worked through," McNaughton told CBC News on Tuesday.

"I can assure everyone out there working in the trades that we'll ensure that enforcement is present on job sites."

A [panel commissioned by the Ontario government](#) is recommending the new agency focus on training and certification in the trades, and the responsibility for enforcement go to the Ministry of Labour's occupational health and safety inspectorate.

Trottier questions whether the college's enforcement of compulsory certification in the auto service sector was ever effective. "I think if you ask the average technician what the Ontario College of Trades actually does for them, they'll shake their heads and go, 'I have no idea.'"

Despite his sense that the lack of enforcement in the past three years was unfair, Trottier doesn't believe it harmed his business.

"All around me, there are businesses that use unqualified staff," Trottier said. "I would love if the Ontario College of Trades would go in there and correct that. But at the end of the day, it doesn't necessarily impact me that much, because I only use staff who meet what my customers expect."