

THE WINDSOR STAR

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Lawsuit filed over web posting Ford employees' private information



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Ford

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A proposed class action lawsuit has been filed against Ford Motor Co. of Canada and an unidentified corporation on behalf of 10,000 current and former Windsor employees of the automaker whose private information was inadvertently posted on an external website.

The lawsuit filed with the Ontario Superior Court in Windsor late Thursday seeks \$13 million in damages and an interim order requiring Ford and the unknown company responsible for the website to pay for credit monitoring services for the employees affected.

It alleges the two companies were negligent for letting the information become public and that they failed to destroy the personal information of those who no longer worked for Ford – claims that have not been proven in court.

In a letter dated Jan. 22 sent to the current and former Ford workers the company said their names, addresses, phone numbers, birth dates and Ford seniority dates “were included in a data upload to a file on an external information technology vendor website.”

The information was immediately removed from the relatively obscure website when Ford became aware in late December, spokeswoman Kerri Stoakley said earlier this week. How long it was posted there has not been revealed.

It is suggested to the affected current and former employees in the letter that they change online passwords, contact Canadian credit bureaus to make sure no one has fraudulently been using their credit cards and consider placing a fraud alert on their financial accounts, as well as with credit agencies.

“Steps are being taken to improve the process and the handling of personal information going forward. We sincerely regret any inconvenience to you or concern caused to you,” concludes the letter signed by Meeta Huggins, human resources manager for Windsor site operations.

“The people who brought this to us have a lot of questions they’d like answered. They’d like to see their personal information handled with a bit more care and they’d like to be compensated,” said Windsor lawyer Sharon Strosberg.

Her firm, Sutts Strosberg, and Falconer Charney, of Toronto, have commenced the lawsuit naming three representative claimants from the Windsor area – current Ford employee Colin MacEachern, retiree Lawrence Damphouse and David Oglan, who was laid off by Ford and took a buyout in December.

Damphouse, who was a janitor, retired in 2004.

“It’s very confusing to him as to why Ford would even have his information,” Strosberg said.

- Ford inadvertently leaks private information of Windsor employees, retirees
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Currently, all the lawyers know about what happened is in the letter which is vague, she said.

Ford will be able to file a statement of defence and make other arguments in court before a judge will have to decide whether to certify the lawsuit as a class action.

“We have not yet been served with a claim and are not in a position to comment,” spokeswoman Stoakley said when reached Friday afternoon.

Strosberg said her firm is involved in two other proposed class action lawsuits over the loss of private information kept in a digital form and expects to launch a fourth next week, the details of which she wouldn’t reveal. The first lawsuit is over loss of a USB drive that contained information about 5,000 Canadians who applied for pensions and other federal benefits. The second covers the loss of two hard drives containing information about 583,000 Canadians who applied for student loans from 2000 to 2006.

“It’s a huge problem in the digital age,” said Strosberg.

The lawsuit against Ford and the unknown vendor claims employers have a responsibility to keep that information safe and private, she said.

The website for the proposed class action is fordprivacyclassaction.com.