

City company on shaky ground now being investigated

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A wind turbine maker based in Charlottetown is under investigation by P.E.I.'s Labour Relations Board after employees complained they were owed up to eight weeks of back pay. Entegri Wind Systems sent most of their workers home late last month after running into financial trouble. But most of their 50 workers haven't been paid since mid-May. The company has not filed for bankruptcy. Roy Doucette, director of labour and industrial relations with the Department of Labour, said they are still trying to determine the status of the company. The department issued an order this week that requires Entegri to pay its employees. The company has 10 days to appeal. If it doesn't pay their employees, the Department of Labour will issue a judgment against Entegri in the courts.

"We don't know a whole lot yet, except for the fact we have employees obviously who have not been paid," Doucette told The Guardian. "We have authority to put third-party demands on monies coming into the company." Most of the companies Entegri does business with appear to be in the U.S. We're not going to be able to do third-party demands if it's outside Canada," added Doucette.

Entegri has offices in Charlottetown as well as in Boulder, Colo. It also has a production plant in Albany, P.E.I. It manufactures, installs, and maintains a 50-kilowatt commercial-scale wind turbine. While the company has customers across North America, it also has wind turbines located in P.E.I. Their turbines are located at Gerrit Visser & Sons Farm in Orwell, the federal agricultural farm in Harrington, Superior Sanitation in Charlottetown, Gulf Shore School in North Rustico, Kool Breeze Farms in Summerside and two at Trout River Industries in Coleman. The company's partners include James Heath, Peter Wilson, and Malcolm Lodge of P.E.I.

The Guardian left messages at the company's offices in both Charlottetown and Boulder, but the messages were not returned. There were also messages left on James Heath's cellular telephone as well as at Malcolm Lodge's home. Heath is chairman, president and CEO, while Lodge is chief technical officer. None of those messages were returned either. The company's Charlottetown offices, on the second floor of 34B Belmont Street, sit empty and the doors are locked. Behind the frosted glass windows, the desks sit with papers and notepads on top. The red light, indicating messages are waiting, continues to flash on the receptionist's telephone. Sources say company officials are in and out of the offices on a daily basis, but they never stay long.

P.E.I. taxpayers could be on the hook for \$400,000 if the company fails. Innovation Minister Allan Campbell described the situation as unfortunate. But Campbell said the province is still prepared to work with the company. "We're not the primary lender at Entegri," said Campbell. "What I understand is that the company has suspended

operations. It's not necessarily shut down. They're accessing some professional advice. They have somebody in taking a look at the operation."

The Guardian spoke to several employees who said they haven't been paid for six to eight weeks and cannot file for employment insurance because the company's future remains unknown.

Environment Minister Richard Brown, who is also the MLA for the district where Entegrity is based, said the company remains an integral part of the province's wind energy plan. He described the problems facing the company as a "bump on the road." "Entegrity Wind is a great company, they've done a lot of great things. The people that are involved in it have been in the wind business for a substantial amount of time," said Brown. "Entegrity Wind was and is a strategic partner in the development of wind in Prince Edward Island." Brown said the company is blaming its problems on the economy. He describes it as a "transition period." As long as the company can get new financing in place, Brown said he expects the employees will be paid. He said he wouldn't be opposed to pumping more public money into the company as long as a strong business case can be made. "It's a great company for the district. It created quite a few jobs and I don't want to lose those jobs."