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Return-to-office rules broken by almost a third of Treasury Board staff: document

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[Catherine Morrison](#)

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Public servants returning to work in downtown Ottawa, Sept. 10, 2024. Photo by Jean Levac /POSTMEDIA

Article content

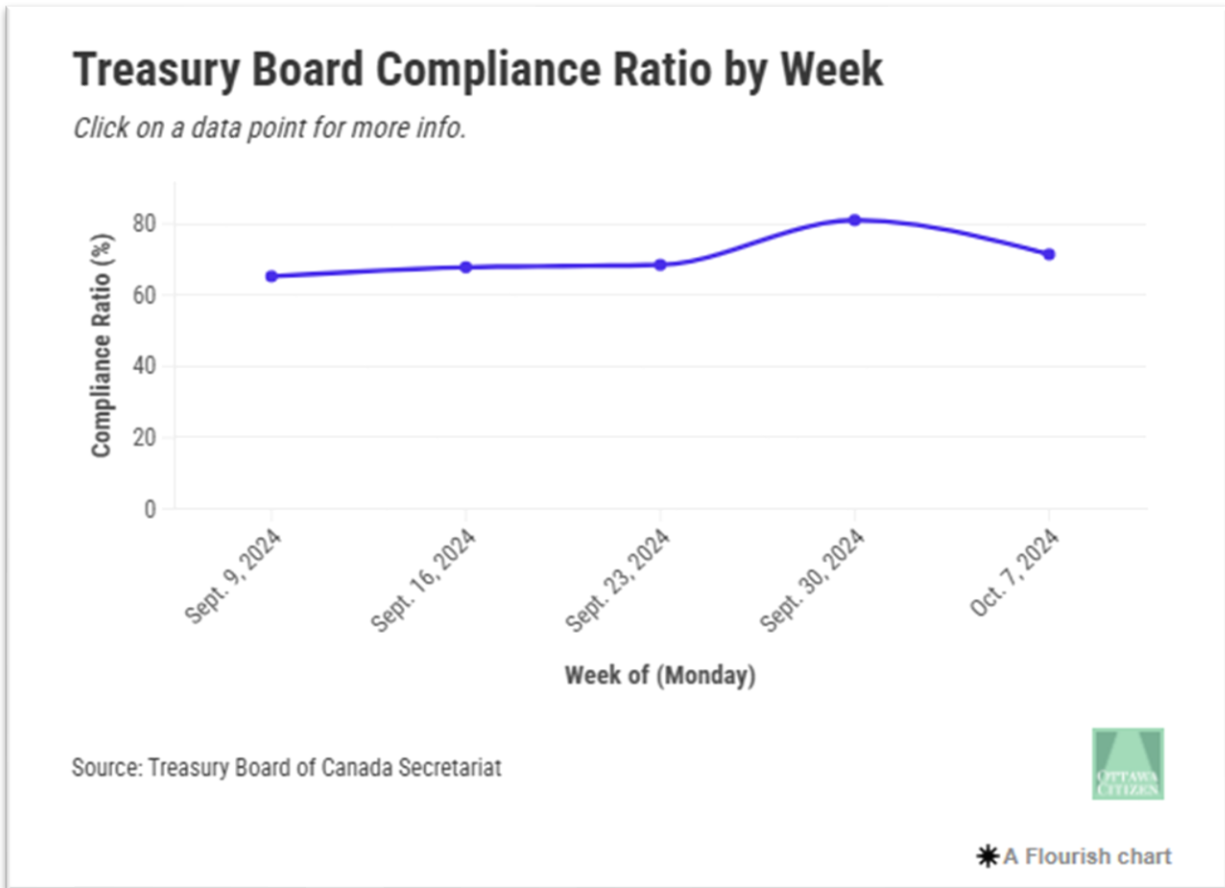
Employees working at the federal department enforcing new return-to-office rules for thousands of public servants have only been about 70 per cent compliant with the mandate, according to government records.

A chart, obtained by the Ottawa Citizen via an access-to-information request showed that only 70.82 per cent of Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat workers followed the new rules in September.

According to the chart, just 65.26 per cent of TBS employees complied with the requirement in the week of Sept. 9, the date the new rules came into effect. It also showed that compliance was 67.81 per cent during the week of Sept. 16, 68.47 per cent during the week of Sept. 23, and 81.02 per cent during the week of Sept. 30.

During the week of Oct. 7, compliance went down to 71.42 per cent. And the chart showed compliance rates for the month of October stood at 71.81 per cent.

Employees who have agreements to work from home full-time were excluded from the data.



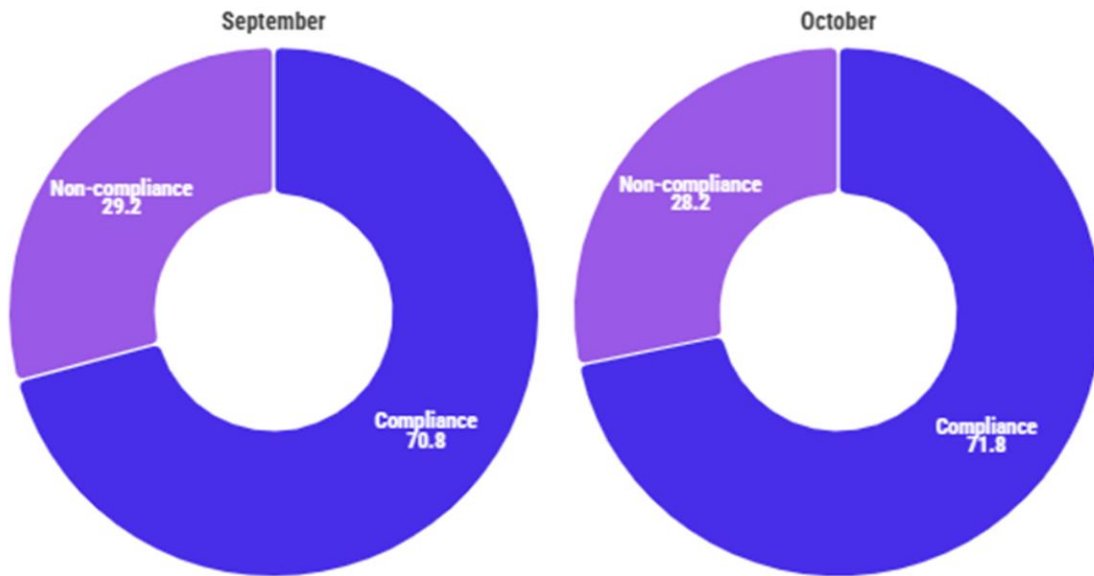
Ada Bayli, a Treasury Board spokesperson, said “there is no issue with compliance” at TBS when it came to the return-to-office rules.

“The baseline data represented in the screenshot provided represents a partial departmental-wide snapshot based on different metrics from systems such as on-site presence and employee leave request data,” Bayli said in an email, adding that the department would continue to monitor overall compliance among its employees.

According to Bayli, the data in the chart “understates employees’ actual compliance with the policy” during this period of time as it doesn’t take into account the fact that some workers had temporary exemptions, language training or travel status. It also didn’t take into account workers’ leave that wasn’t entered into the department’s HR system yet, Bayli said.

But the Treasury Board couldn’t confirm how many employees fell into these categories in September and October.

Treasury Board Compliance Ratio by Month



Source: Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat



*A Flourish chart

Since September, [the federal government has required](#) many public servants to be in the office at least three days a week. Executives have been required to be in the office for at least four days a week.

A [Treasury Board guide for deputy heads and departmental heads](#) of human resources shared with the Ottawa Citizen in August said that, when an employee deliberately failed to comply with a telework agreement, managers should consult with their labour relations experts and consider applying “relevant and progressive discipline” to correct the behaviour.

It said typical steps included verbal reprimand, written reprimand, suspension without pay of escalating duration and termination of employment, but they could be taken in varying orders.

“Before taking any of the above measures, managers should ensure that individual circumstances are considered on a case-by-case basis, including human rights obligations, such as the duty to accommodate, or whether an employee has a reasonable explanation for the behaviour,” the guide said, adding that managers must “clearly communicate expectations and consequences,” including that onsite work at the designated worksite was the “default assumption.”

Bayli said that the department’s workers must have a “valid work arrangement agreement” and that managers must monitor employee attendance.

“The current approach to identifying and addressing non-compliance with the direction is working well and we have no plans to change the approach at this time,” Bayli said.