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— ROB DRINKWATER, Special to the Sun

Hardip Singh Brah holds a press conference at his Subway restaurant, at 1519 50 St., yesterday to explain his filing of a human rights commission complaint against a Subway anti-turban policy.

Harassed over turban says sub shop owner

By ROB DRINKWATER
Special to the Sun

A Sikh owner of four Subway restaurants in Edmonton has filed a human rights complaint against the chain, claiming the company has been harassing him over his turban.

Hardip Singh Brah says no one had a problem with him wearing his turban from the time he opened his first Subway in Edmonton in 1992, up until 2000 when he owned nine shops. That's when a new district agent, based with the company's regional office in Calgary, began giving him grief.

"He said I cannot wear a diaper on my head," Brah told a news conference yesterday in one of his south-side restaurants. "That made me sick."

Kevin Kane, a spokesman for Subway's head offices in Milford, Connecticut, said the company's uniform policy allows exemptions for religious headgear, and that the dispute between Brah and Subway is over a lawsuit between the two parties.

"We have hundreds of people wearing turbans in Subway," Kane said.

"Issues with this owner are not to do with turbans."

Brah filed a complaint with the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission, and says an investigation report by the commission found evidence of discrimination by Subway.

Commission director Marie Riddle says investigation reports are confidential and are only released to the parties involved. Complaints are made public, she says, when a panel is convened for a public hearing, which is done when other efforts to resolve the dispute have failed.

Brah says after 2000, company officials became more strict with their inspections of his restaurants, and found faults that previously weren't noticed. He says he believes the scrutiny was an attempt to harass him because of his turban.

One Subway report, supplied by Brah, reprimands him for working behind the counter while wearing his traditional headgear. "You must wear the approved Subway head covering," the report states.

Brah, who has lived in Canada since 1981, owned nine Subways in Edmonton in 2000 but says he sold five because of the ongoing company harassment. He is now selling his four remaining stores and is suing Subway for \$550,000.

Brah's daughter, Rupe Brah, says her father's stores got awards from Subway before the current district manager took over, and he was called on to help other stores.

"We got a lot of recognition," she says. "When stores went out of compliance, we'd be the ones who were called in to help them out."