

Musk's Twitter disbands its Trust and Safety advisory group

December 13 2022, by MATT O'BRIEN and BARBARA ORTUTAY



SpaceX's Elon Musk waves while providing an update on Starship, on Feb. 10, 2022, near Brownsville, Texas. Musk's Twitter has dissolved its Trust and Safety Council, the advisory group of around 100 independent civil, human rights and other organizations that the company formed in 2016 to address hate speech, child exploitation, suicide, self-harm and other problems on the platform. The council had been scheduled to meet with Twitter representatives Monday night, Dec. 12. But Twitter informed the group via email that it was disbanding it shortly before the meeting was to take place, according to multiple members.

Credit: Miguel Roberts/The Brownsville Herald via AP, File

Elon Musk's Twitter has dissolved its Trust and Safety Council, the advisory group of around 100 independent civil, human rights and other organizations that the company formed in 2016 to address hate speech, child exploitation, suicide, self-harm and other problems on the platform.

The council had been scheduled to meet with Twitter representatives Monday night. But Twitter informed the group via email that it was disbanding it shortly before the meeting was to take place, according to multiple members.

The council members, who provided images of the email from Twitter to The Associated Press, spoke on the condition of anonymity due to fears of retaliation. The email said Twitter was "reevaluating how best to bring external insights" and the council is "not the best structure to do this."

"Our work to [make Twitter a safe, informative place](#) will be moving faster and more aggressively than ever before and we will continue to welcome your ideas going forward about how to achieve this goal," said the email, which was signed "Twitter."

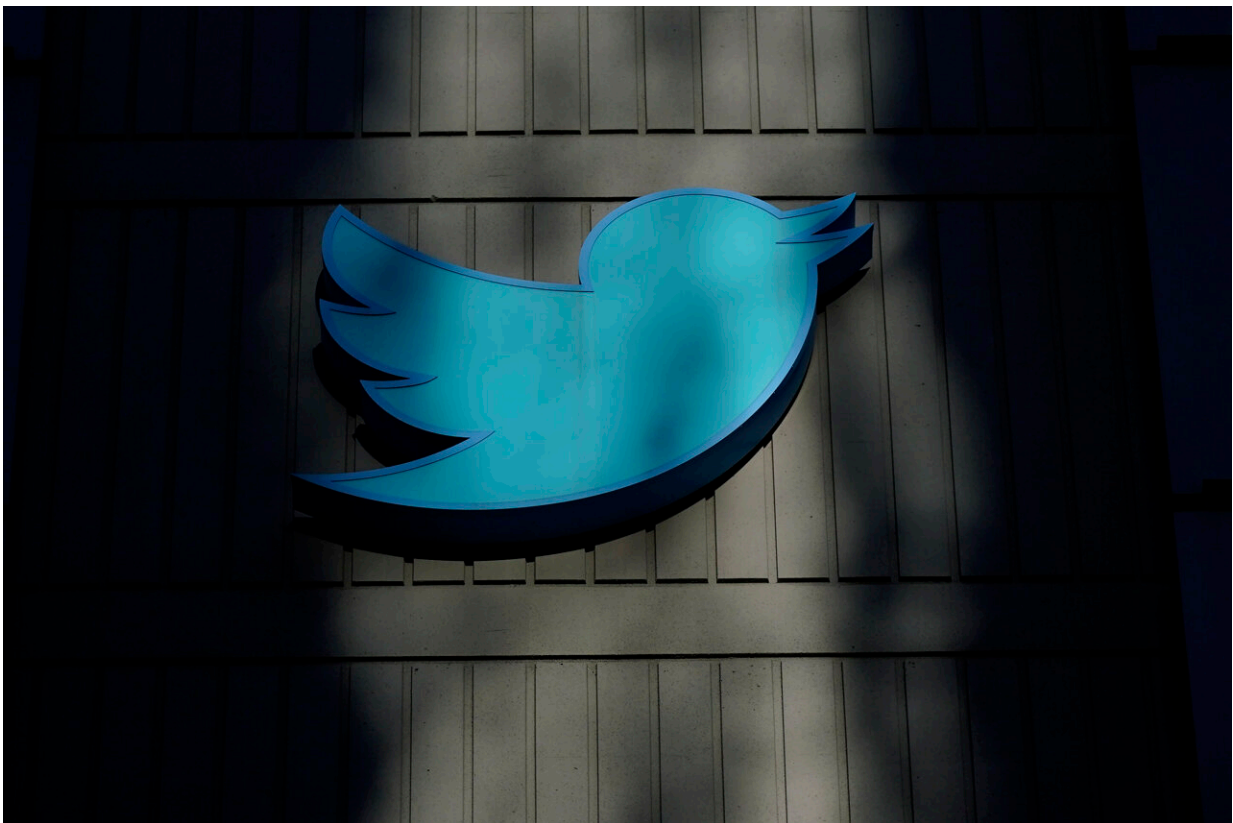
The volunteer group provided expertise and guidance on how Twitter could better combat [hate, harassment and other harms](#) but didn't have any decision-making authority and [didn't review specific content disputes](#). [Shortly after buying Twitter for \\$44 billion in late October](#), Musk said he would form a new "content moderation council" to help make major decisions but later changed his mind.

"Twitter's Trust and Safety Council was a group of volunteers who over

many years gave up their time when consulted by Twitter staff to offer advice on a [wide range of online harms and safety issues](#)," tweeted council member Alex Holmes. "At no point was it a governing body or decision making."

Twitter, which is based in San Francisco, had confirmed the meeting with the council Thursday in an email in which it promised an "open conversation and Q&A" with Twitter staff, including the new head of trust and safety, Ella Irwin.

That came on the same day that three council members announced they were resigning in a public statement posted on Twitter that said that "contrary to claims by Elon Musk, the safety and wellbeing of Twitter's users are on the decline."



A sign at Twitter headquarters is shown in San Francisco, Friday, Nov. 18, 2022. Elon Musk's Twitter has dissolved its Trust and Safety Council, the advisory group of nearly 100 independent civil, human rights and other organizations that the company formed in 2016 to address hate speech, child exploitation, suicide, self-harm and other problems on the platform. The council had been scheduled to meet with Twitter representatives on Monday night, Dec. 12. But Twitter informed the group via email that it was disbanding it shortly before the meeting was to take place, according to multiple members. Credit: AP Photo/Jeff Chiu, File

Those former council members soon became the target of online attacks after Musk amplified criticism of them and Twitter's past leadership for allegedly not doing enough to stop child sexual exploitation on the platform.

"It is a crime that they refused to take action on child exploitation for years!" Musk tweeted.

A growing number of attacks on the council led to concerns from some remaining members who sent an email to Twitter earlier on Monday demanding the company stop misrepresenting the council's role.

Those false accusations by Twitter leaders were "endangering current and former Council members," the email said.

The Trust and Safety Council, in fact, had as one of its advisory groups one that focused on child exploitation. This included the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, the Rati Foundation and YAKIN, or Youth Adult Survivors & Kin in Need.

Former Twitter employee Patricia Cartes, whose job it was to form the

council in 2016, said Monday its dissolution "means there's no more checks and balances." Cartes said the company sought to bring a global outlook to the council, with experts from around the world who could relay concerns about how new Twitter policies or products might affect their communities.

She contrasted that with Musk's current practice of surveying his Twitter followers before making a policy change affecting [how content gets moderated](#).

"He doesn't really care as much about what experts think," she said.

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Citation: Musk's Twitter disbands its Trust and Safety advisory group (2022, December 13) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2022-12-musk-twitter-disbands-safety-advisory.html>

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