
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Health
BC Ambulance Service

BCAS PROGRESS ON CORONER JURY RECOMMENDATIONS

VICTORIA – The BC Ambulance Service (BCAS) has made progress on the eight jury recommendations following the coroner’s inquest into last year’s tragic deaths of four people, including two paramedics, at Kimberley’s Sullivan Mine, said Sue Conroy, chief operating officer for the provincial emergency service.

The coroner’s inquest was held in Kimberley from July 9 to July 13, 2007 when the jury brought down 16 recommendations. Eight of these applied to BCAS.

“The BC Ambulance Service has taken the jury recommendations very seriously,” said Conroy. “We started our review immediately following the end of the inquest and have made good progress on many of them.”

Renovation work at the Kamloops dispatch centre will include adding sound proofing materials to the walls and ceiling to help address concerns over ambient noise. “This recommendation is timely as staff in the Kamloops dispatch centre were relocated to a temporary site four months ago when the permanent facility had to be evacuated due to a sewer problem,” said Conroy. “The move has allowed BCAS to do a more comprehensive review and we are now developing plans to renovate the former area. In addition, we are also looking at options to add sound proofing material to the temporary dispatch centre, which will continue to be used while extensive renovation work is carried out in the main facility.”

Paramedics and dispatchers have been provided with the WorkSafe BC definition of a confined space and an update on the enhancements that will be made to training programs later this year. “Our policy has not changed over the years and, following an assessment of the scene, paramedics are not to enter confined spaces,” said Conroy. “Search and rescue crews are called in first to ensure the scene is safe for paramedics to provide emergency medical services.”

BCAS will continue to work through the jury recommendations as well as the 42 recommendations that followed its internal investigation and the two from the chief inspector of mines.

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1 backgrounder(s) attached.

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BACKGROUND

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JURY RECOMMENDATIONS – SULLIVAN MINE TRAGEDY

The following steps have been taken to address the jury recommendations following the July 2007 Coroner's inquest into last year's deaths of four people at Sullivan Mine in Kimberley.

- 1. To follow question #3 on the EMD (Emergency Medical Dispatch) protocol with the further question "is the victim inside or outside a building?" This could lead to card #22 Confined Spaces. This could then be expanded as to what type of building. REVIEW UNDERWAY**

The BCAS Provincial Dispatch Quality Committee met July 18 and tasked a small group of BCAS dispatch experts to review and enhance dispatch protocols to better identify calls involving confined spaces as well as other potential safety hazards.

This review, including recommendations, will be completed by the end of August, 2007 with implementation in September.

- 2. Dispatch should have access to mine rescue telephone number 24 hours/day similar to CANUTEC (Canadian Transport Emergency Centre) for advice on rescue protocol regarding abandoned mine sites. REVIEW UNDERWAY**

BCAS, with the co-operation of the Ministry of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources is creating a list of mine inspectors by region that can be used by all BCAS dispatch centres to access information about individual mine sites.

- 3. Install sound proofing/deadening materials on the walls and ceiling to cut down on ambient noise in the dispatch centre. REVIEW COMPLETED, IMPLEMENTATION UNDERWAY**

This recommendation will be incorporated into pending upgrades to the Kamloops dispatch centre. The renovation model is the recommended option and BCAS is working with the provincial government's Accommodation and Real Estate Services branch to move forward with the improvements.

Currently, employees in the Kamloops dispatch centre are located in a temporary facility. BCAS is also assessing the possibility of adding sound proofing materials to the temporary facility.

- 4. Enforce that communication centre dispatchers take entitled breaks away from their work stations. REVIEW COMPLETED, IMPLEMENTATION UNDERWAY**

Employees take breaks during slower periods but all are available during times of high demand. This recommendation highlights the importance of balancing work – to ensure patients receive timely and quality care - and breaks – to ensure staff receive some downtime. BCAS has started a discussion with dispatch supervisory charge dispatchers and managers to determine the best process to follow.

- 5. Issue one oxygen sensor per ambulance mandatory to be worn by the senior person at all times while on shift. Appropriate training along with the issue of the sensor be provided. REVIEW UNDERWAY**

BCAS has begun a search of the types of sensors that are available on the market and what emergency services and ambulance services in other jurisdictions use now. BCAS works as part of a team in rescue situations. Fire departments are called upon for rescue and paramedics are then responsible for providing medical treatment once it is safe to do so. BCAS strongly supports providing our paramedics with the training, procedures, and tools to ensure their safety.

- 6. Make it mandatory for all BCAS staff to review the BC WorkSafe website and take the confined space course annually and have the supervisor record and track their progress. REVIEW COMPLETED, IMPLEMENTATION UNDERWAY**

When paramedics join BCAS, they must successfully complete two Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) training programs during their first two months of probation. Each program has a component on recognizing confined spaces: Controlling Workplace Hazards and Controlling Workplace Exposures. Both of these programs will be revised to include additional information on confined space recognition and reflect current research in decision-making in risk assessment and risk management.

BCAS has issued an update to all paramedics that outlined WorkSafe's definition of "confined space". The memo also states "...the focus for employees of the BCAS should be on the 'identification and recognition' of confined spaces. The BCAS is not in the business of search and rescue; paramedics are not to 'enter' confined spaces"...

- 7. The Kimberley station assign a full time unit chief to ensure training and compliance are maintained to a high standard. POLICY REVIEW UNDERWAY PRIOR TO INQUEST**

A review of the full-time unit chief position at rural ambulance stations has been underway for several months and a decision on next steps is expected within the next six months. In situations where these positions have been vacant, all unit chief duties have been performed by paramedics who have been assigned the acting unit chief role.

- 8. BCAS designate a contact for the families of the deceased to provide periodic updates on the progress and state of implementation. RECOMMENDATION COMPLETED**

BCAS has contacted the families of the deceased paramedics and has set up a process for the Executive Director of the Interior region to provide regular updates on the progress of the recommendations and state of implementation.

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