

Security deficiencies allow gun to get into jail

HALIFAX, N.S.

By Trisha Richards

Nova Scotia's Department of Justice is pledging to beef up security following an incident last Christmas Eve in which a loaded .22-calibre handgun made its way into the Central Nova Scotia Correctional Facility before being discovered in a trash can nine hours later.

The metal detector sounded six times as the handgun was passing through, but the signal was apparently not sufficient to prompt staff to carry out additional checks.

Justice officials plan to take measures to enhance the safety of both staff and inmates. A department review has recommended several corrective measures to improve practices when offenders are admitted to the facility.

The recommendations revolve around, among other issues, admitting and discharging procedures that were followed during the incident, working with staff to review standard operating procedures for protecting evidence at a potential crime scene, ensuring staff have a working knowledge of current policies and procedures, and disciplinary action.

"Our internal review showed that mistakes were made and proper security procedures were not followed," justice minister Michael Baker says in a statement.

Prior to the incident, correctional staff made several complaints to internal security with respect to contraband that had been smuggled into the facility, says Mitch Simpson, president of the correctional officers branch of the Nova Scotia Government & General Employees Union. "The superintendent failed to put anything in place until the gun came in," Simpson says.

Improving security is a matter of management working with staff to go over the basic protocols to ensure everybody is familiar with the rules, says justice department spokesperson Richard Perry.

Simpson, who calls the recommendations "fine" but "vague descriptions," says there needs to be more training done because workers are providing their peers with misinterpreted information on protocols.

Perry has a more basic explanation for what went wrong. "It would have been prevented had people followed the proper procedures. That's the bottom line," he says.

The key is to ensure these good recommendations are properly implemented, says NDP labour critic Frank Corbett. "Finding a firearm in that type of workplace is extremely dangerous. At no point should employees have to worry about firearms on their work site," Corbett says.

late February by a former student who then turned the gun on himself.

Peter Keatainak, a former student of Qaunnaq Continuing Education Centre in Salluit and the son of the school commissioner, entered Ikusik School and shot the teacher and then himself. Keatainak, 18, had been suspended two weeks earlier after assaulting another student in class.

The teacher, in her second year on the job, was hospitalized for neck wounds. Keatainak died from self-inflicted injuries.

Many teachers in the small Nunavik communities of northern Quebec could be forced onto medical leave unless the Kativik School Board does more to support them, charges Patrick D'Astous, president of the Northern Quebec Teachers' Association (NQTA). D'Astous made the grim prediction as teachers returned to work, after initially refusing to do so.

Josée Savard, a teacher at Ikusik School and an NQTA representative, says teachers refused to return to work because they were not equipped to deal with the psychological aftermath of the shooting in their classrooms — not because they were afraid of students. "We were asked to deal with a crisis. We didn't have any resources," Savard says.

The teachers demanded greater

administrative support, noting that the school lacked a full-time principal and secretaries. Since the shooting, the board has assigned a principal to the school.

The school board is also considering a range of measures to address safety issues at its 19 schools and training centres in communities across the Nunavik region. The board is working on a protocol of safety measures, which Debbie Astroff, public relations officer for the board, calls a "starting point," to provide direct and practical support to schools in the areas of violence prevention, bullying prevention, and behaviour management. Outside consultants with violence prevention expertise have been sent to schools where concerns have been raised, Astroff says.

Normand Sylvestre, the new principal of Ikusik School, says staff have been deeply affected by the shooting. "It's hard. Some are still a bit shaken. They were expecting some help, some support, and that's what I'm trying to give," Sylvestre says.

Sylvestre, a former school principal who has come out of retirement, says the schools will be looking at doing more hall monitoring. "We'll be keeping an eye on everything, and if we notice anything, we'll call and get someone to deal with the individuals."

— Conrad McCallum

ST. JOHN'S, NFLD.

Sentencing provisions not carried out

Sun Construction Company Limited faces five oh&s charges for its alleged failure to comply with sentencing provisions ordered in connection with a fine following a worker's death in 2000.

In November of 2003, the court ordered the construction company to pay \$25,000, in addition to a number of creative sentencing provisions to promote workplace safety, after it entered guilty pleas on three oh&s violations. The fine was paid in full, but the charges are the result of an investigation by Newfoundland and Labrador's OH&S Branch relating to the sentencing provisions.

Francis Penney, 43, was using a steamroller to roll crushed stone in preparation for paving on October 27, 2000. Penney somehow fell off and died instantly when the steamroller ran over him.

Several of the preceding items are based on stories from our sister publication, Canadian Occupational Health & Safety News, a weekly newsletter designed to provide detailed coverage of Canadian oh&s and workers' compensation issues. For more information or for a complimentary trial subscription, call (416) 442-2122 or toll free (800) 668-2374.