

Ferry crew exposed for pot use

BOB MACKIN
QMI Agency

A Transportation Safety Board memo warning B.C. Ferries that crew members were smoking pot on the job was a real bummer for boss David Hahn.

In an Oct. 23, 2007, staff memo published Monday, Hahn complained of TSB

"interference" after the federal regulator's Oct. 17, 2007 memo about cannabis use by crew members of B.C. Ferries' northern fleet.

"While the company may not agree with all aspects of TSB's memorandum, we do take it very seriously and are committed to making improvements throughout the fleet to the

areas highlighted by TSB," Hahn wrote.

The 2008-published TSB investigation into the March 22, 2006, sinking of the Queen of the North said "some crew members in safety-critical positions" were casual marijuana users who lit up on board or in port. There was no proof that key crew members

were stoned or drunk when the ferry struck Gil Island, but no toxicological tests were performed.

B.C. Ferries has had a zero tolerance policy to drugs and alcohol since 2005 and a counseling and rehabilitation program for employees. Employees are subject to mandatory drug tests.

Victory for tree planters

LAURA BAZIUK
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More than 50 B.C. tree planters were awarded nearly \$230,000 in unpaid wages earlier this month after being forced to work in deplorable conditions. On Jan. 17, the B.C. Employment Standards Branch ordered Khaira Enterprises, a Surrey-based tree planting company run by Khalid Bajwa and Hardilpreet Sidhu, to pay their employees \$228,687.51.

"It's a huge victory for the workers," said Ros Salvador, a B.C. Public Interest Advocacy Centre lawyer, who represented 25 of the 57 tree planters named in the government's decision. On Monday, it was also ruled Khaira must pay \$3,500 in penalties.

The planters, mostly African

and homeless now after going unpaid, were forced to work long hours, sleep in confined spaces and subjected to violent racial discrimination.

Salvador said the centre must still resolve some denied Employment Insurance benefits, and that the Ministry of Forests, Mines and Lands had earlier been aware, the centre claims, of Khaira's mistreatment, but did nothing to stop it. "Now we are facing a homeless life," tree planter Moka said. "In my pocket, I don't have anything"

Khaira has 30 days to appeal the decision, Salvador said. If the money is still unpaid by then, the government can start collecting it from the company.



CHERRY BLOSSOM FESTIVAL

125TH ANNIVERSARY

The public is being encouraged to purchase a cherry blossom as part of an initiative to plant 3,000 of the trees to further green the city for Vancouver's 125th anniversary celebration. The fifth Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival, March 26-April 22, is offering the trees for \$40 until March 29, or while supplies last. Mayor Gregor Robertson is planting the first tree March 2 at City Hall. The festival includes the "Haiku Invitational", an outdoor concert and a Japanese street festival. For more information, visit www.vcbf.ca.

— QMI AGENCY

ADVISORY BOARD

Help for B.C.'s privacy watchdog

LAURA BAZIUK
QMI Agency

B.C.'s privacy watchdog has created an external advisory board to help with her duties.

Information and Privacy Commissioner Elizabeth Denham announced Monday she has invited six people from both the public and private sector to help identify and address emerging privacy problems in the province.

"Most of the [commission's existing] staff are fully utilized resolving important access disputes and privacy complaints," Denham said in a release. "I want to enhance the office's other vital responsibilities, such as public education, policy work, research and providing expert guidance to public and private sector."

The six board members are University of Victoria political

scientist Colin Bennett, former assistant privacy commissioner Heather Black, privacy consultant Drew McArthur, former B.C. privacy commissioner David Flaherty, UBC law professor Ben Goold, and former B.C. police complaints commissioner Dirk Ryneveld.

"It really is a good cross-section [of people] to look for ideas and ways in which to

further her mandate," McArthur told QMI, saying he planned to help educate small and medium businesses about their obligations to preserve both their customers' and employees' privacy.

"The more education [we get], the better off we are," he said.

Denham was not available for comment.

Olympic bonus bust

BOB MACKIN
QMI Agency

Cutbacks kiboshed the last batch of bonuses for ex-VANOC employees, QMI has learned.

Chief financial officer John McLaughlin's Jan. 6 memo notified ex-employees of the Olympic organizing committee that the final installment of bonuses was cancelled.

VANOC planned to dole out \$30 million through an Employee Completion and Performance Plan to prevent staff from leaving in the final year before the 2010 Games. A Dec. 21, 2009-published quarterly report showed \$177.05 million

was in trust as of Oct. 31, 2009. There was no mention of the bonus program in the Dec. 17, 2010-published post-Games financial report.

Bonuses were based on length of service and seniority. A sum was to be paid upon the employee's exit and the remainder several months after the Games.

McLaughlin could not be reached for comment. Neither vice-president of communications Renee Smith-Valade nor finance committee chair Ken Dobbell would comment.

VANOC used \$187.8 million from taxpayers to avoid losing money on its \$1.884 billion operations budget.



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