

**Ottawa-Carleton Regional
Police Service ComCentre
23&24 Division**

MEMORANDUM

To: Supt. Patrick Moyle

From: A/Insp. Ian Davidson

Subject: ComCentre Evacuation

Date: 26 Feb 96

**Copy: D/Chief Ray Renaud, 9-1-1
Management and Advisory Board.**

Sir:

On Friday, Feb 16th at approximately 1630 hrs. Supervisor Joanne Frost of -C- Platoon was approached by Lynn Cavanagh (who is 7 months pregnant) claiming that she was feeling faint and nauseous as a result of paint fumes permeating the ComCentre. Ms. Cavanagh was immediately sent home. At 1800 hrs. several other members, including Sgt. Lauzon and Supervisor Frost, began suffering from "dry coughs, burning eyes and being overwhelmed by fatigue."

Sgt. Lauzon determined the fumes were coming from stairwell B located next to the ComCentre entrance. He obtained two fans and attempted to vent the area. This seemed to improve air quality moderately, but did not remove the strong fumes. Both Insp. Hill and I were advised of the problem, as was Cst. Brian Dodds as the officer safety representative.

I advised Supervisor Frost to have the engineer increase the air exchange capacity to 100% and to ensure only one access area was used by the staff. Ms. Frost indicated that everyone was feeling the effects and she was rotating people out of the Centre at twenty minute intervals. If the situation did not improve she was to call me at home.

At approximately 1915 hrs. I attended the ComCentre and noticed a very strong odour of paint fumes near the entrance, with less noticeable fumes inside. I was apprised of the problems by Sgt. Lauzon and Supervisor Frost and decided to speak to everyone on duty. Each person complained of symptoms ranging from mild breathing problems to sore eyes

and nausea. Two people noticed blood when they blew their noses. At 1900 hrs. Naomi Picard reported for duty and within a few minutes began suffering from breathing problems. She left the Centre and returned a short time later. I observed her breathing to be laboured, her eyes were red and noticeably swollen, which resulted in the decision to send her home as well.

In the interest of the health and safety of our personnel I ordered the temporary evacuation of the Centre until air quality improved. Ottawa Fire was contacted and advised of the problem and requested to prepare for the arrival of 9-1-1 personnel at the Randall Fire Station. However, we were informed that with the new phone system it should be technically possible to handle all 9-1-1 calls from either ComCentre located in 21 or 22 Divisions. Nepean was selected as a better alternative and three of our members were taken there to set up the "call transfer procedure." The administration and the seven digit emergency numbers were to be call forwarded to the information desk, as was the dispatch capacity. When all people were in place the 9-1-1 switch over was completed. However, within minutes it was clear that all of 21 Division's calls (including administration) were coming through the 9-1-1 lines. The second technical failure experienced was the lack of call forwarding capacity of the regional administration and emergency number to the information desk. Until this situation was resolved, normal ComCentre and 9-1-1 procedures had to be resumed at 474 Elgin St.

Sgt. Lauzon advised Gord Turner (Bell Canada) of the problem with the phones. He lives some 40 miles from the station but agreed to attend as soon as possible. Upon his arrival he located and remedied the problem. It was later learned that when Bell switched to the new system they inadvertently omitted to re-program the capacity to call forward the lines.

With the phone capacity restored the ComCentre evacuation was completed without significant problems. All phone calls, including 9-1-1, administration and the seven digit emergency number were handled at the information desk by our personnel. Dispatching capability was handled by the "card system" operating on one channel in the same area.

Air quality seemed to improve at about 0300 hrs. and normal operating procedures were resumed shortly thereafter.

Conclusions

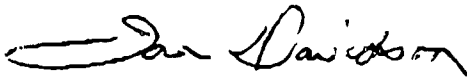
- 1) I have been able to determine that the paint used in the station is an "oil based low odour" formula. This paint was selected for its durability as part of the contract with the Region. The effects on certain people is obvious and could have been avoided.
- 2) The failure to program the phones for relocation was an oversight by Bell Canada and slowed the evacuation procedure. However, discovering this now was beneficial under circumstances allowing for margins of error.
- 3) Regionalization provides an opportunity to develop an improved evacuation procedure and ensure universal training.

Recommendations

- Conduct a full debriefing of the evacuation;
- Liaise with the Region and our Finance Section to ensure that any work that may impact on the effective operations of the OCRPS be done in conjunction with divisional managers, particularly the Communication Centres and 9-1-1 Bureau. It is imperative that everyone understands the ramifications to the emergency service environment and its personnel;
- Establish a working committee to develop more efficient evacuation procedures and to ensure everyone is trained in this procedure.

These recommendations are currently underway and a subsequent report will be prepared.

Respectfully,



Ian Davidson