

Full steam ahead for B.C. Ferries' \$9 million operations centre in Victoria

BY MATTHEW PEARSON, TIMES COLONIST JUNE 23, 2009



Monique Turgeon works from her station at B.C. Ferries' \$9-million operations and security centre in Victoria.

Photograph by: Debra Brash, Times Colonist

B.C. Ferries new, \$9-million operations and security centre in Victoria might have prevented the sinking of the Queen of the North had it been in operation at the time, the ferry corporation's chief operating officer said today.

"It certainly would have reduced the probability of it occurring," Mike Corrigan told reporters at the unveiling of the new facility inside the company's headquarters on Fort Street. The centre is able to track ships with Automatic Identification System technology which Corrigan says could reduce the likelihood of a similar incident. Two people died in March 2006 when the ferry sank along B.C.'s North Coast.

The centre came online last month and provides B.C. Ferries with a birds-eye view of its entire operations.

"If there is anything happening out there, we are the first to know about it," he said.

The centre provides staff with real-time surveillance footage from the field and allows them to assist operations by responding to safety, security and environmental incidents, mechanical failures and severe weather or service interruptions.

Corrigan said it means B.C. Ferries will be able to deliver up-to-the-minute information to passengers about traffic flow and potential delays.

The centre looks much like one would think a high-tech facility would appear.

Five individual workstations face a bank of large-screen monitors across the front wall of the room. The dashboard, as the two screens in the centre have been dubbed, records real-time activity and can be controlled by employees from their desks.

On this day, the footage is fairly mundane. A man in a mustard-coloured bicycle jersey is buying a ticket from a drive-up window, a white, 18-wheeler is lining up on the tarmac ready to board and there is a shot of empty parking lanes inside a vessel.

A boardroom adjacent to the security centre can be used for planning meetings in the event of an emergency.

"We can actually feel the pulse of whats going on," said Gregg Clackson, the operations and security centres director.

"The centre will be staffed all day, everyday, all year long."

Clackson said employees working in the centre, including one former captain, are long-time B.C. Ferries staff. The eight positions are not unionized.

The security upgrades will cost B.C. Ferries about \$34 million.

The ferry corporation has already installed 400 surveillance cameras in its

terminals, ticket counters and vessels, and plans to install an additional 400 cameras.

All of the cameras are monitored by the operations centre.

B.C. Ferries has also installed new perimeter fencing and electronic locks on the doors of bridges and engine rooms.

The focus on ferry security is ramping up as the 2010 Winter Olympics approaches, Corrigan said.

Although the ferry corporation has never faced a credible security threat, he said the enhanced security still makes sense.

"I think its prudent to provide customers with that level of protection," he said.

B.C. Ferries vessels transport about 22 million passengers and eight million vehicles annually, Corrigan said.

mpearson@tc.canwest.com

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