

Halifax strengthens security, post 9/11

Harbour, airport receive major security upgrades

By Tom Mason

Of all the ways the world will change in the next 25 years, as predicted by the Seven Revolutions, nothing will affect our daily lives more than the changing nature of conflict. Acts of terrorism and global "asymmetrical" war are becoming more and more a part of our daily lives — the way communities like Halifax deal with these new threats will impact all of us in years to come.

Since its founding 250 years ago, Halifax has always been shaped by the nature of conflict. The port city continues to be a key military base — whether the threat has been wooden ships or cold war, the city's civilian and military infrastructure has evolved and developed accordingly.

Today is no exception. Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the port has invested significantly in increased security. Halifax is one of the most important container ports on North America's Atlantic coast, with the American market for container traffic expanding every year.

Port officials have purchased a new harbour patrol boat, hired more security guards and beefed up infrastructure. That infrastructure includes state-of-the-art mobile gamma-ray scanners using photon technology similar to a medical CAT scan to peek into containers. The port also uses ion mobility spectrometers as the electronic version of a bomb-sniffing dog, with the ability to smell hazardous materials at a molecular level. In addition, electronic dosimeters detect traces of radiation that would be present if, for example, terrorists were trying to send a dirty bomb to the United States via a container.

The new technology is expensive but it is all part of doing business, says George Malec, vice president of operations for the Port of Halifax. "Security is an enabler," says Malec. "Good security is a given for a port like ours that has high volumes of container and cruise ship traffic. Otherwise we run the risk of losing our competitive advantage."

About 200,000 cruise ship passengers visit the Port of Halifax every year; 95 per cent of them are American citizens.

"They want to feel safe, and Port security plays a big part in that," says Malec.

Security is also a key priority at the Halifax International Airport. With more than three million passengers passing through the airport annually, the Airport Authority has spent more than \$30 million on improvements like Airport Square and the new flight observation deck.

"The terrorist attacks in 2001 made airport security an even bigger priority,"



Joseph Robichaud Photography

The Port of Halifax shares the second largest natural harbour in the world with the Canadian military. It is also a major port for container traffic and cruise ships. As a result, and to afford Halifax a competitive advantage when it comes to attracting companies, the city has combined comprehensive and effective security with the latest technologies. These include such things as: state-of-the-art mobile gamma-ray scanners, similar to a medical CAT scan, to peek into containers; ion mobility spectrometers, an electronic version of a bomb-sniffing dog; and electronic dosimeters to detect traces of radiation.

says Airport Authority spokesperson Pat Chapman. The airport increased the security check-in area from three to five lanes, stepped up patrols along the facility's 14 kilometres of perimeter fencing and installed more security cameras, all moves designed to keep passengers safe while moving them through the airport as quickly as possible. The Airport Authority also offered security training to all 5,000 tenants who work at the airport.

"9/11 had a huge impact on the airline industry and we've responded to that," says Chapman.

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the Canadian military. Security is obviously a major priority for the fleet since Halifax is the centre of operations for the navy on the east coast.

"Since 9/11, Maritime Forces Atlantic has been focusing on information sharing with groups like the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the Port of Halifax," says Lieutenant Commander David MacArthur, the navy's security spokesperson in Halifax. "We've also increased surveillance at the approaches to Halifax Harbour."

An open-base policy in Halifax was shelved after the terrorist attacks, and the navy opened a new Maritime Operations

Surveillance Centre to monitor security operations in the port.

Malec says that while Halifax is not on a shortlist of terrorist targets, that doesn't mean the port should relax its guard.

"We defer to the experts, and the experts are telling us that the priority targets are elsewhere. But we can't afford to be any less vigilant when it comes to security."

Greater Halifax Partnership vice president and chief economist, Fred Morley, agrees. "Businesses are looking for safe and secure environments to set up shop and good security is both efficient and effective. Communities and countries that

are on the cutting edge of security technology have a significant competitive advantage. Those that have combined comprehensive and effective security with the latest technologies and innovations are able to attract the types of companies needed to grow and prosper. Halifax must be known as a safe place to live and work if we are going to fit that profile."

"There is no such thing as perfect security," says Malec. "It is a continuing process of testing and revision. Security is a fact of life in the transportation community and, here in HRM, we are getting very good at it."

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