

## Port, border security get \$1 billion infusion

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OTTAWA - Boosting Canada-U.S. border protection while chopping waiting times are pegged as priority areas for \$1 billion in national security funding announced in Wednesday's federal budget.

The federal government is also pledging to boost police presence at marine ports -- part of \$326 million spread over five years to protect transportation infrastructure.

Of the \$433 million promised over five years for border initiatives and equipment, about \$100 million will go toward improving dangerous working conditions for guards.

Increased self-defence training for those posted in remote areas and replacement of antiquated radio systems were cited Wednesday as programs that will benefit directly.

The new technology will make it easier for guards to contact law enforcement on both sides of the border in a crisis situation, but some ongoing staffing concerns were not addressed.

While more resources are poured into major crossings to make good on the government's pledge to reduce waiting times by 25 per cent, unions have complained that too many of Canada's remote posts are designated as "work-alone" sites.

Funding also will cover new emergency response teams and patrol vessels for the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Seaway.

Transport Canada will see \$16 million over the next five years to develop systems to collect more data about air travellers for national security purposes.

The Canada Border Services Agency already has access to detailed personal information and itineraries to screen for terrorists, and it wasn't immediately clear how new programs would differ.

The budget announcement confirmed air travellers will see another marginal decrease in security fees that were instituted after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, however. The tax for a domestic flight will be reduced to \$5 from \$6, while international travellers will now pay \$17 instead of \$20.

A \$117-million chunk will go towards combatting financial crime by maintaining the RCMP's existing Integrated Proceeds of Crime (IPOC) units for the next five years.

Launched in the early 1990s to increase seizure of profits and assets from organized crime groups, the IPOC units have operated on short-term funding. The budget makes IPOC permanent.

While terrorist financing investigation is mentioned, there's no new money to speak of. An official said IPOC is a separate entity from the Mounties' Anti-Terrorist Financing Group, which has warned that continued underfunding puts Canadians, and the government's international reputation, at risk.