

MORE CUTS TO COAST GUARD SERVICES REDUCES SAFETY, CAW SAYS

The Canadian Coast Guard has announced that it will further reduce its safety services to mariners beginning in 2014 and 2015 by closing ten marine communications and traffic services centres across Canada, the CAW says.

After reducing staff at most of these centres and closing two Marine Rescue Centres in St-John's and Quebec City, the Coast Guard is further reducing the safety network for mariners, said Martin Gregoire, President of CAW Local 2182, who represents the 350 marine communications and traffic services officers working at the twenty-two marine communications and traffic services centres across the country.

"It makes no sense to further reduce the safety services that are available to mariners," Gregoire said.

As of May 17, 184 marine communications and traffic services officers working at 10 marine communications and traffic services centres were informed that their center was closing, he said.

These centres are St-John's and St-Anthony, NL, St-John, N.B., Rivière au Renard and Montréal, Qc, Thunder Bay, ON, Vancouver, Tofino and Comox, BC. This is in addition to Inuvik, NWT closing at the end of 2012.

The new Coast Guard plan is to provide service from a distance. For example: Vancouver, which is the busiest port in the country, will now have their marine communications and traffic services provided from Victoria, BC.

This approach may work well for air traffic control, however, with marine traffic, it is different, Gregoire said. Local knowledge is most important, knowing about currents, tides, local users and geography is critical when providing assistance to mariners and regulating marine traffic, said Grégoire.

"Prime Minister Stephen Harper's cost cutting agenda includes a total disregard for marine safety," said Gregoire. "We urge mariners to write to the Coast Guard Commissioner, to stop these closures before something serious happens."

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