

News Release

Canadian Auto Workers Local 2182 – Marine Communications Officers

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Largest oil spill response ship in Monday public relations exercise for federal Natural Resources Minister Joe Oliver came too close to a BC Ferry, then ran aground on 11-hour trip to Vancouver from Esquimalt base, say two Coast Guard unions – CAW & UCTE - and ForestEthics Advocacy

Government still plans to close Vancouver Coast Guard marine communications station

VANCOUVER – Hours before a public relations exercise by federal Natural Resources Minister Joe Oliver took place Monday in Vancouver Harbour, the largest oil spill response ship taking part came too close to a BC Ferry in Active Pass and then ran aground later on during an 11-hour trip from its Esquimalt base to Vancouver, says the Coast Guard's marine communications union.

BC environmental group Forest Ethics says Oliver's assurances that Vancouver will be adequately protected in the event of an oil spill should be taken with a grain of saltwater.

And the union representing crew at the now closed Kitsilano Coast Guard Station says the federal government actually moved the oil boom containment boat previously located there all the way to Richmond's Sea Island hovercraft base, at least an hour away from Vancouver Harbour.

Allan Hughes, Regional Director of the Canadian Auto Workers Local 2182 – representing Canadian Coast Guard Marine Communications Officers – says the Burrard Cleaner No. 9 – the largest oil spill response skimmer vessel owned by private contractor Western Canada Marine Response Corporation – was involved in a close quarters situation with a BC Ferry and then ran aground near Sandheads off the Fraser River on the way to Vancouver, a trip that took 11 hours.

"It's astonishing to think that the safety and protection of Canada's busiest port is dependent on a quick response in the event of an oil spill and this is what we get – a response vessel grounding itself and taking 11 hours to arrive in Vancouver," said Hughes.

"Minister Joe Oliver announced nothing actually new on Monday to add to the Port of Vancouver's protection and didn't bother telling media about the Burrard Cleaner No 9 incident or just how far away major oil spill response ships are from Vancouver," Hughes said.

"There are wrecks littered all over this coast that continue to leak oil that the government has not acted in cleaning up since the 1950's," he added.

"This is all smoke and mirrors while in reality they are dismantling the safety net in Vancouver Harbour, by moving Vancouver's Coast Guard Marine Communications and Traffic Services Centre to Victoria – and have in February already closed the Kitsilano Coast Guard Station and Vancouver Coast Guard radio.

ForestEthics Advocacy representative Ben West said Oliver's visit to Vancouver was literally a

baseless attempt to gain positive media coverage while doing worse than nothing. Joe Oliver's claims that Vancouver will be better protected by the federal government should be taken with a grain of saltwater, they barely even managed to get the oil spill response vehicle to a press conference in one piece" West said.

"The irony of the minister's mishap enroute to his press conference should be a serious reminder for us all that in the event of even a small oil spill in Vancouver harbour we are in deep trouble with current resources."

"Oliver's PR stunt is all about trying to convince British Columbians that increased oil exports through the Port of Vancouver and down our coast is no big problem," West said. "But the government has actually closed the Kitsilano Coast Guard Station and plans to eliminate Vancouver's marine communications station only increase the risk of a serious and potentially devastating accident here.

Dave Clark – Union of Canadian Transportation Employees BC Regional Vice-President – says the oil boom containment boat previously anchored at Kitsilano Station was moved to Sea Island when the Station closed, increasing response time by at least an hour.

"The oil boom containment boat was literally just around the corner from Vancouver Harbour at Kitsilano – now it would take an hour's travel time even in good weather to get from Sea Island to the site of a spill," Clark said. "That's another move that reduces – not improves – protections services."

Hughes said federal plans continue to close the Marine Communications & Traffic Service centre in the Harbour Centre building that directs and monitors tanker, freighter, cruise ship, tugboat, ferries, pleasure craft and other large vessel traffic in the Port and move its operations to Victoria to be done remotely by cameras and radar is ludicrous.

The federal government is also closing Canadian Coast Guard Marine Communications & Traffic Service centres in Comox and Tofino, further jeopardizing safety at sea, Hughes said. And Hughes said other measures proposed as "new" by Oliver are either already in effect or window dressing that will not improve prevention, only response.

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