

How the system failed Dziekanski

If anything, the Canada Border Services Agency's report on its interaction – more precisely, its lack of interaction – with Robert Dziekanski on Oct. 13/14 makes the heart sink even further. There is no evidence of venality in the CBSA report – which does not cover the period during which Mr. Dziekanski was tasered – but only some horrible misconnects, perplexing human error and institutional incompetence on the part of an agency that is at the front line of Canada's national security.

After arriving at Vancouver International Airport on a flight from Germany after a long day of travel from his native Poland, Mr. Dziekanski cleared primary inspection and was ordered to report to immigration's secondary processing area. According to the report, he did not do so, but for "unknown reasons" proceeded to the baggage area. Nobody with the CBSA then noticed that the passenger had failed to report. Mr. Dziekanski apparently wandered around the luggage carousels for more than six hours, although nobody can be certain, since security cameras were obstructed by construction work, preventing "full optical coverage of the area." If this sounds slipshod, it gets worse.

At 7 p.m., nearly four hours after Mr. Dziekanski's arrival, his stepfather contacted the CBSA secondary processing area and "advised [that] he and his wife had been at the airport for five hours waiting for his wife's son, a Polish male." A border services officer did a visual scan of

the area, checked the names of people being detained, and told the stepfather that no one fitting Mr. Dziekanski's description was there. No light bulbs were going on at the airport that day.

The CBSA only rediscovered Mr. Dziekanski, a passenger now missing nearly 6½ hours, when he tried to leave the luggage hall. He was intercepted and sent to the secondary processing area. After two more hours, he completed the immigration process and was released. He then sat down, and remained there for 24 minutes before being told again that he was free to leave. Nine and a half hours after his arrival, he finally entered the international reception lounge. Less than an hour later, Robert Dziekanski was dead.

The CBSA's handling of his case was careless, even inept. The agency is trying to learn from its mistakes, saying that it will install more security cameras, explore options for more patrols and security checks within the CBSA's secure area, and review procedures to ensure that people who are ordered to report for secondary examinations do so within a "reasonable amount of time." New procedures will make up for a lack of common sense.

Still, the CBSA did not kill Mr. Dziekanski. Had the border services officers known that Mr. Dziekanski's long day in their lax custody would end with his taser death at the hands of four RCMP officers, they would no doubt have exercised more diligence.

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