

Border agency vows to improve monitoring

Polish-speaking officer was not called to key confrontation

BY IAN BAILEY VANCOUVER

A Canada border services employee with a working knowledge of Polish dealt with confused Polish immigrant Robert Dziekanski at one point as he wandered a secure area of Vancouver International Airport, but officials did not rally the employee to assist when the agitated Mr. Dziekanski, unable to speak English, had a fatal confrontation with Mounties hours later.

After six weeks of silence, the Canada Border Services Agency issued an eight-page report yesterday on the Dziekanski case to try to explain how the 40-year-old man was able to wander the international arrivals area for more than six hours before his death on Oct. 14.

The report recommends various changes, including additional cameras to track its area at the airport, more patrols, and a review of interpreter services and updated lists of the languages employees can speak.

In the document and at a subsequent news conference, the agency said it did its best to track Mr. Dziekanski, but faced challenges in doing so through an area the size of two football fields that was crowded, at times, with up to 4,000 travellers.

Officials also said views of fixed cameras were limited by construction in the area.

Mr. Dziekanski, a construction worker, arrived Oct. 13 at 3:30 p.m. on a flight from Frankfurt, planning to join his mother, a resident of Kamloops, and begin a new life in Canada.

Just after 1 a.m. on Oct. 14, Mr. Dziekanski, agitated and throwing items around, died after being subjected to two taser blasts from four Mounties, who were called to the scene to deal with him — a confrontation seen around the world on video footage shot by a bystander.

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Sanctions against border staff ruled out

» As the border services agency yesterday vowed to do more to better communicate with travellers who do not speak English, officials conceded that a member of staff who had "some limited knowledge of the Polish language," dealt with Mr. Dziekanski as he was clearing immigration.

In a briefing that agency staff refused to allow the media to record, Blake Delgaty, regional director-general for the Pacific Region, suggested the Polish-speaking staffer was otherwise occupied when Mr. Dziekanski became erratic and began yelling in Polish.

The decision astonished the lawyer for Mr. Dziekanski's mother, Zofia Cisowski. "It raises all kinds of questions," Walter Kosteckyj said.

"How can you have this incident happening not more than 150 to 200 feet away not come to the attention of the customs people?" he said, suggesting the agent could "absolutely" have been called to translate during the confrontation with the Mounties.

Mr. Kosteckyj said he was not entirely satisfied with the eight-page report. "It talks about the fact that 'We are going to explore options,' instead of implementing options," he said in an interview.

He said Mr. Dziekanski's mother had not been briefed on the report, but has said apologies matter less to her than the fact that she no longer has her son.

Alain Jolicoeur, the border agency's president, expressed his condolences to Mr. Dziekanski's family yesterday.



Border Services Agency President Alain Jolicoeur answers questions after yesterday's briefing. LYLE STAFFORD FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL

However, he ruled out sanctions against any staff of the agency, saying it was his view that they followed procedures.

Mr. Jolicoeur called it "very odd" that someone would spend six hours in the airport in such a manner.

"But it occurs every day that people spend many hours in that very area so I am very, very sorry and really wish we had found out about Mr. Dziekanski before," he said, promising aggressive change.

Mr. Jolicoeur said he had reviewed video footage from fixed cameras that allowed him to actually see Mr. Dziekanski in the last hours of his life.

"He looked like any traveller. In fact, he leaves with other travellers. He's obviously tired like every international traveller is."

The report suggests that Mr. Dziekanski's stepfather called the agency's secondary area at

one point, looking for Mr. Dziekanski, but was told he was not there. At about 2 a.m. on Oct. 14, Mr. Dziekanski's mother was told that her son had been seen earlier.

Vancouver International Airport promised yesterday to announce its own measures on Dec. 7, based on its own internal review of the matter.

Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day who is responsible for the Canada Border Services Agency, would not comment on the report yesterday.

But opposition members had plenty to say.

"This is an astoundingly deficient report," said Ujjal Dosanjh, the Liberal Public Safety critic. "It provides a bit of a timeline but doesn't provide any exhaustive, thorough answers to any major questions."

» With reports from Gloria Galloway in Ottawa and Justine Hunter in Victoria

The last hours of Robert Dziekanski

3:20 P.M. His flight from Frankfurt arrives at the Vancouver International Airport.

4:09 P.M. After waiting in line, Mr. Dziekanski is reviewed by primary inspection, which directs him to immigration.

7 P.M. A man calls the Canadian Border Services Agency and says he and his wife have been waiting in the airport for her son, a Polish immigrant, for five hours. The border service officer checks the immigration area and does not find anyone matching the description. The officer then takes the caller's cellphone number. The caller says he was going home to Kamloops.

9:25 P.M. After being "unaccounted for" by security cameras, Mr. Dziekanski is seen in the CBSA hall near a baggage carousel.

10:35 P.M. Mr. Dziekanski leaves the CBSA hall to go to customs. He shows a border services officer an immigrant visa that hasn't been processed. The officer looks through Mr. Dziekanski's luggage for the rest of his documents, but does not find them.

10:44 P.M. Mr. Dziekanski is escorted back to immigration.

11:15 P.M. A border services officer finds two pieces of Mr. Dziekanski's luggage at a baggage counter and brings them to the immigration area.

11:30 P.M. The border services officer who earlier spoke with the man and woman who were to meet Mr. Dziekanski tells another border services officer about the conversation. That officer pages the couple over the PA system while two other officers process Mr. Dziekanski's immigration documents, which were found in his bags.

11:40 P.M. The border services officer who paged the couple calls Mr. Dziekanski's family and leaves a message.

12 A.M. A border officer who has a limited knowledge of Polish completes Mr. Dziekanski's immigration process and releases him.

12:39 A.M. The same border services officer notices Mr. Dziekanski still waiting in immigration and tells him again that he is free to leave. The officer escorts him to the customs secondary area.

12:46 A.M. Mr. Dziekanski exits the area and walks toward the international reception lounge.

2:10 A.M. A woman identifying herself as Mr. Dziekanski's mother calls the CBSA. The border services officer who just helped him speaks to her. He says he had helped her son, would look for him, and get him to call her if he was found. That officer then learns from the RCMP what had happened to Mr. Dziekanski.

» Kyle Harland