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SPECIAL REPORT For Immediate Release

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CANADIAN AIRPORT SECURITY STILL LEAVES PASSENGERS AT RISK

With the 2010 winter Olympics scheduled to begin less than two months from this date, the gateway to Vancouver appears to have a huge security gap.

VANCOUVER, BC: ACG CIS: December 15, 2009

A troubling incident occurred at Vancouver International Airport (YVR) that should serve as a wakeup call for those charged with the safety and security of the travelling public. As reported by CBC News and others a valet driver reversed an SUV into a departures area of Vancouver International Airport Tuesday (December 15) morning.

Witnesses say a Honda Pilot SUV crashed through glass doors into the U.S. departures area around 6 a.m. PT.

Terry Giannakos was checking in at the Delta counter when he heard the vehicle coming. "First you heard this loud crash and glass smashing.... We could see the SUV coming in ... spinning and sliding on the floor," said Giannakos. "It looked like it was going to miss us and then it started to curl towards us ... and then we started to run."

There were about 150 people in the departures area at the time, but nobody was injured in the incident, including the driver of the SUV, Giannakos said. However, the vehicle did destroy an unoccupied kiosk that was under construction.

Giannakos said it appeared the vehicle had just been dropped off by a woman at the valet parking service and the driver had mistakenly reversed it into the building.

Police said it appeared the incident was an accident.

With the 2010 winter Olympics scheduled to begin less than two months from this date, the gateway to Vancouver appears to have a huge security gap. With all the bad jokes and humour aside, this incident could have been a lot different and with serious consequences and casualties.



CREDIT: CNS File Photo

Serious security gaps at Canada's airports are still putting the safety of Canadians at risk and the government is failing to address those gaps, according to a Senate report..



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Two years ago in Scotland an eerily similar incident occurred that did have a more serious outcome. The scenario was a large, bustling airport with many travelling passengers and high profile public events planned.

In June 2007 two men slammed a Jeep SUV into the departure doors of Glasgow airport, turning the vehicle into a potentially lethal fireball. One witness said, "They were obviously trying to get it further inside the airport as the wheels were spinning and smoke was coming from them."

Another witness said the Jeep sped up to the building at around 30 miles per hour in an area where people usually drive much more slowly. "Then the driver swerved the car around so he could ram straight into the door," the Press Association news agency quoted the witness as saying. "He must have been trying to smash straight through. Luckily he did not get the car too far in."

The Glasgow attack came on the first full day of the school summer vacations, when thousands of people were awaiting flights. The sight of the dark green Jeep Cherokee smashing into the building, its tires spinning, and bursting into flames spread panic and terror among thousands of people awaiting flights, witnesses said.

Hours after the attack, hundreds of passengers remained stranded on airplanes on the tarmac. The authorities said they could not be moved into the airport building because of potential further dangers there.

The attack in Scotland seemed to have taken the authorities at that time by surprise. Rae Willie Rae, the chief constable of the Strathclyde area around Glasgow, called the attack an act of terrorism and confirmed that there had been no prior intelligence warning of an attack. The developments gave rise to a deepened foreboding among security specialists that Britain was confronting a new threat: the use of relatively unsophisticated, homemade explosive devices to claim lives and spread mayhem. A senior Western security official speaking in return for anonymity because he was not authorized to brief reporters called the attack "less directed from Al Qaeda and more a matter of a home-grown group," although the attack seemed to be modeled on terrorist attacks in Iraq.

Authorities worried that if the plot was the work of a small, hitherto undetected cell, it raised alarms that Britain's terrorism threat is broader than the 2,000 suspected radicals known to authorities in 2007.

The events in Scotland seemed marked by the same sense of an improvised attack.

The events at Glasgow Airport in 2007 came as London was braced for a weekend of high-profile public events including a gay pride march, the Wimbledon tennis tournament, and a concert to honour the memory of Diana, Princess of Wales.

In March of the same year (2007) a Canadian Senate report was released that gave rise to headlines such as "Lax airport security putting Canadians at risk". That report stated that serious security gaps at Canada's airports were putting the safety of Canadians at risk and the government is failing to address those gaps, according to the Senate report.



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In a report titled **2007 Security Guide Update: Airports** and authored by the Senate committee on national security and defence said few recommendations from its first report, issued more than four years earlier, have been implemented and it's had a hard time getting answers from the government on why.

"Some improvements" have been made, reads the report, "but they are few and far between." The eye-opening report issued in 2003 said many of the strict security regulations introduced after 9/11 were largely cosmetic and that behind the scenes, airport security was severely lacking.

The committee suggests that the problems highlighted four years ago, and again in this current report, are not being taken seriously enough by the government and that Canadians should be even more shocked now than they were in 2003 about the slack security.

"The Committee would like to assure the public that the numerous gaps that remain are being treated with some degree of urgency by government and the departments that have jurisdiction over them. But we cannot," reads the report. "What you may find shocking is that so many of the gaping security holes we drew attention to in 2003 are still gaping holes more than four years later," it said.

The Senate committee report states there are still "way too many holes" in airport security and summarizes the contents of its report with the following message: "Let's smarten up, before it's too late."

And now here we are in 2009 and it is still possible to drive a vehicle into the US departures area of the airport terminal.

This may indeed have been an accident as declared by the RCMP. But there are some troubling points. This vehicle was driven by a valet; a person who should be the very nature of his employment should know the difference between reverse and forward gears and between the brake and the gas pedal. He did this every hour of every day he worked. You don't just all of a sudden, without external influence, panic and drive into the terminal. He has had to have parked vehicles many hundreds of times before.

There are more questions than answers here. Appears to be an accident? At which point does the driver put on the brakes? When he hits the glass; while going through the doors; as the vehicle is moving across the check in area; when the SUV finally crashes into the kiosk? One would think that a valet driving for a living could call this incident an accident only until he hit the door and anything beyond that point causes questions to form.

Should the travelling public be concerned that this might be a trial to test airport response to this type of 'accident'? Or that persons with ill intent may realize that there are huge gaping holes in the security precautions around the Vancouver International airport?

A vehicle moving at 15 MPH is covering 22 feet per second so it does not take a long time to be on the wrong side of the building. The security implications of this are enormous. Post 9/11 it



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should be impossible to drive a vehicle into an airport. What if this SUV this was packed with explosives? What is even more disturbing is the fact that this airport is getting ready to host the world during the 2010 Winter Olympics. This driver may have done officials a big favour by exposing a MAJOR weakness in airport security.

This shouldn't have happened in our post 9/11 world. It appears that some authorities would prefer to go back to Sept 10 2001. The first Senate report to the House of Commons in 2003 and the follow up report in 2007 have shown this. Has anything changed? Travelers cannot take bottles and toothpaste on the plane but they can still leave their car unattended for minutes on end and no one will tow them.

If we were really concerned about security and safety, drivers would park their cars in the parkade. Travelers would disembark at the end of the parkade / terminal walkways with the valet service taking over their vehicles from that point. This little accident, however funny but dumb, should show everyone that it takes nothing to drive a car, dump truck or whatever into an airport and do the unthinkable.

Meanwhile it would be good to know that vehicle intrusion barricades are in place for the 2010 Olympics. Hopefully they get installed soon.