

From: Marianne RYAN

Sent: June-14-14 2:00 PM

To: Marianne RYAN

Subject: Message from Commanding Officer "K" Division

Message to all Alberta RCMP employees from the Commanding Officer

Last July, the Commission for Public Complaints against the RCMP (CPC) initiated an independent review to assess if RCMP actions during the flooding disaster in High River were well founded, reasonably executed and in accordance with our policies. Once the CPC review began, the RCMP demonstrated our commitment to police transparency and accountability by refraining from public comment on High River operations. We did this to ensure the integrity of the independent review process.

Early on in the CPC review, we were advised that the final report would not be completed until late 2013 or early 2014. Then as time progressed, we learned that due to the sheer volume of information involved, the CPC report would not be issued until late June 2014 at the earliest. As we near the one year anniversary of this tragedy, it appears that the report will not be made public until later this summer.

Unfortunately, this situation has left us open to 11 months of unmitigated public criticism and speculation on our actions in High River. During this time, I have become increasingly concerned about the impact of this criticism on RCMP employees, many of whom risked their own safety to rescue hundreds of people and to secure the community after the waters receded.

That is why I need to provide you, the RCMP employees who live and work in Alberta, with some of the factual information we have already provided to the CPC. Some of this information has never been accurately reported in some of the media coverage or reflected in the editorial comment about High River. I hope this will clarify for you at least, a few of the indisputable facts about High River. While I still have a limited ability to address some of the issues, I am convinced that the time has come to set the record straight on a few things that I can speak to.

One recent editorial openly questions the motive behind the fact that "local RCMP were put on leave for a month after the fourth day of the flood." This information as presented, presumably obtained via an Access to Information and Privacy (ATIP) request, is correct. However, what the commentator neglects to point out is that at least 10 High River RCMP employees who remained on duty during the first 24 hours were themselves impacted by it. While assisting with the emergency, their families were left to fend for themselves. Several lost their homes and others sustained significant property loss. After four days of putting the needs of others before their own, these employees were relieved of their duties so they could focus on personal matters. To suggest they were granted leave for any other reason does a great disservice to them and their families.

Some media commentators continue to question why the RCMP and other emergency responders entered private homes in High River but did not do so in other flood-impacted communities. The simple fact is that at the peak of the disaster, there were 65 people reported missing in High River, with 17 still missing when door-to-door searches ended on June 24th.

During the door-to-door searches, teams comprised of RCMP, Canadian Armed Forces, ATCO Gas and Fortis Alberta personnel entered 4,666 homes and businesses in High River for the purpose of locating missing persons and checking for gas leaks. Forced entry occurred at 754 of those locations. After June 24th and until July 13th, when home inspections ended, the RCMP acted as security escorts for pet rescue, building inspection and utility crews. The majority of homes were re-visited at least once again for these purposes.

During the course of the door-to-door search operation, the RCMP took possession of restricted and non-restricted firearms from residences for safekeeping. These firearms were made available for owner retrieval from the High River RCMP as soon as the evacuation order was lifted. In our view, unsecured weapons in a community where police could not ensure home security posed a significant public and officer safety risk. This made sense to us at the time, and the CPC review will determine if we got things right.

As the anniversary of the flooding disaster approaches, we will be posting some factual information we have provided to the CPC on both the Alberta RCMP external and internal website. This will serve as a way to clarify misinformation. Our goal is to provide journalists, employees and the public with a credible source of information on our actions in High River.

Notwithstanding the unrelenting criticism of our actions by a very vocal minority over the past year, I am very grateful for the public support the RCMP continues to receive in High River, and throughout Alberta from Canadians who understand the challenges police face when disaster strikes. We know our work can profoundly impact people's lives, as it certainly did in High River, and we take that responsibility to heart.

Stay tuned and keep the faith.

M.C. (Marianne) Ryan, M.O.M.
Deputy Commissioner
Commanding Officer Alberta RCMP