

Press release

Plague of drone deliveries

Correctional Service Canada isn't doing enough

Donnacona, June 13, 2021 – The Union of Canadian Correctional Officers (UCCO-SACC-CSN) is calling on Correctional Service Canada to step up the fight against deliveries of packages to penitentiaries by drone, the efforts made thus far having proven insufficient. This morning, UCCO-SACC-CSN staged a realistic simulation of a drone delivery at Donnacona, Qc.

New radar systems

After years of repeated requests, Correctional Service Canada (CSC) will install advanced radar equipment to detect drones in the coming months. “The radar will allow for more effective detection of drones overflying penitentiaries, which is a step in the right direction,” says Frédéric Lebeau, Quebec Region President of UCCO-SACC-CSN. However, CSC is planning to install only five radar systems at the 49 federal institutions across the country. Donnacona is the only penitentiary in Quebec where radar is to be installed.

Interception

Furthermore, radar will solve only the detection side of the problem. “Once a drone is detected, how will we get our hands on the package before the inmates do?” asks Lebeau. Interception is essential to keep the contents of the packages out of the penitentiaries. “For now, CSC is dragging its feet: there have been preliminary discussions about securing cell windows and putting roofs over the prison yards, but nothing more. If no effort is made to intercept packages, the radar won't do much good.”

Seizure

Correctional officers are also demanding expedited installation of body scanners at all penitentiaries. “Once inmates have the illicit items in their possession, they hide them wherever they can. Body scanners will enable us to seize these items.” Parliament passed Bill C-83 in 2019, which provides for the installation of body scanners, but two years later, plans have yet to be finalized. Scanner pilot projects are supposed to be implemented at two penitentiaries, in Ontario and Alberta. “However, inmates will be able to choose whether or not to be scanned, which concerns us. We are waiting impatiently for the regulations that will spell out how the Act is to be applied. It is imperative that scanning be mandatory; otherwise, what purpose will the technology serve?”

A scourge

Deliveries by drone are particularly frequent at the Donnacona Penitentiary and have been increasing in recent years. “There's everything; drugs, weapons, cellphones, tobacco. It's all worth a fortune on the inside.” The drugs and weapons are taking their toll on inmates and causing outbreaks of violence between inmates and against correctional officers. “The cellphones are used to communicate with the outside and arrange deliveries. The tobacco often causes inmates go into debt, which can have dire consequences.” In recent months, despite the ban on visits and the curfew, Donnacona correctional officers have intercepted an average of two packages per week. “That's just the ones we see. There are all the deliveries that get past us.” During the month of May 2021, there were eight drug seizures, five weapons seizures, two alcohol seizures, four tobacco seizures and four cellphone seizures at Donnacona. “75% of this contraband was brought in by drones,” says Frédéric Lebeau.

Source: Union of Canadian Correctional Officers (UCCO-SACC-CSN)

Information: Noémi Desrochers - noemi.desrochers@csn.qc.ca Cell: 514-216-1825