

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS' FIFTH REPORT, THE PROTECTION OF MONUMENTS DEDICATED TO CANADIAN VETERANS

Recommendation 1

That Public Services and Procurement Canada:

develop a response plan specifically for federal memorials, and that this plan be distributed widely to serve as a guide for similar plans by all public, community and private organizations responsible for the custodianship or maintenance of memorials.

Government Response

PSPC agrees with this recommendation. To date, PSPC has actively taken steps to develop a Security Incident Playbook designed to facilitate an effective response for key stakeholders, by fostering greater collaboration and helping prevent the escalation of events during the management of civil protest incidents affecting building, engineering and/or architectural assets belonging to PSPC. Additionally, as part of its review of the existing Security Incident Playbook, PSPC will draft a specific protocol for federal memorials and monuments dedicated to Canadian Veterans, and will subsequently work with each department or organization implicated in federal monuments and memorials in order to develop this protocol. Other modifications may also be made through consultation with stakeholders and other levels of government.

Some information within the Security Incident Playbook is sensitive and explains PSPC's approach to civil unrest, protests and demonstrations, which could be used by an individual (or groups) to determine how PSPC would respond in these situations. Consequently, it is not in the best interest of the security of the Canadian public to disseminate this information broadly. However, PSPC will work with implicated stakeholders to share general information and strategy to assist others responsible for the custodianship, or maintenance, of memorials. PSPC could provide guidance to other departments and federal entities as they make plans or develop their own security incident playbooks, to mitigate similar events in properties under their unique mandates.

review its Security Incident Playbook following the events of the 2022 occupation of the National War Memorial site, in consultation with federal and municipal partners and stakeholders, to ensure it will meet the needs for potential future mass protests or gatherings.

Government Response

PSPC agrees with this recommendation. PSPC is committed to ensuring that the PSPC Security Incident Playbook remains a useful tool for the PSPC Property and Facility Management community. It is essential that the information contained in the PSPC Security Incident Playbook remain current with all policies, procedures, and guidelines that may affect the protection of PSPC property and assets and in light of all newly emerging threats and risks. As such, PSPC will ensure a full review of the Security Incident Playbook, in consultation with the stakeholders identified and with federal and municipal partners and stakeholders for The National War Memorial site, and complete any required updates to better anticipate the mitigation needs for future mass protests and gatherings.

Recommendation 2

That the Government ensure increased coordination between federal departments, including PSPC, Veterans Affairs Canada, the Department of National Defence, the National Capital Commission, and others as needed for the maintenance and security of federal monuments and memorials.

Government Response

The Government agrees with this recommendation. To date, several federal government departments involved in the management of The National War Memorial and The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, including Veterans Affairs Canada, PSPC, the Department of National Defence and Canadian Heritage (each with its own responsibilities with respect to the memorial sites) have collaborated in their efforts to ensure the proper protection and security for The National War Memorial and The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, while at the same time safeguarding public accessibility. The National Capital Commission has the responsibility for the lands adjacent to these memorials, as well as being the custodians for other monuments and memorials dedicated to Canadian Veterans, including other nationally significant public places, and are therefore implicated in this response.

In order to ensure effective and well coordinated responses to potential future incidents involving monuments and memorials dedicated to Canadian Veterans, it is important that all responsible departments and entities involved with the management of these sites identify all roles and responsibilities and move forward in a more collaborative effort nationally, while acknowledging the importance of each site's challenges and uniqueness.

Consequently, PSPC and Veterans Affairs Canada will work together in establishing a national working group, including other implicated departments and entities, to increase coordination and engagement among all stakeholders and with a goal to additionally establish a list of monuments and memorials dedicated to Canadian Veterans within the responsibility of the Government. For The National War Memorial in particular, Veterans Affairs Canada will also be consulted with stakeholders in the Parliamentary Precinct to ensure enhanced coordination as needed for the maintenance and security of that particular site, as it is the target of most of the incidents that have occurred to date.

Following this, the Government commits (through this working group) that:

- A custodian department or organization be clearly identified for each of these memorials and monuments.
- Each custodian department, or organization, will then work with their existing or established security community to ensure increased coordination between federal departments including PSPC, Veterans Affairs Canada, the Department of National Defence, the National Capital Commission, and others as needed for security of each site for which they are implicated.
- The site lead will identify the key stakeholders and define the roles and responsibilities for those involved with the management and security of the site.
- That all identifiable threats and risks for each site be listed, and a plan of action be prepared in anticipation of any related incidents occurring. Plans of action must be regularly updated to ensure they remain current as political and social environments continue to evolve.
- Further engagement on monument and memorial related security issues will be conducted.

Recommendation 3

That the Government increase public education and awareness campaigns on the importance of all of Canada's national war memorials and monuments to ensure all Canadians know the significance of these sacred sites.

Government Response

The Government agrees with this recommendation. Memorials in Canada, and around the world, keep alive the achievements and sacrifices of those who served Canada in times of war, conflict and peace. Veterans Affairs Canada currently supports delivery of a wide range of public education activities, learning materials and public information awareness campaigns, but more can and will be done. To this end, the Government commits to enhancing initiatives aimed at helping Canadians understand the important role memorials play in recognizing and

honouring the contributions of Canadian Veterans and all who have served. These activities will be undertaken within existing resources.

Going forward, VAC will expand opportunities to highlight the importance of memorials as sacred sites. Work is already underway to identify innovative ways to help young children connect with the importance of memorials through VAC's Veterans' Week learning materials, including development of new supportive materials for teachers. VAC is also exploring new methods and partnerships to bring the experience of visiting international memorial sites to Canadians through virtual tours and digital platforms. This includes plans to develop and user test virtual presentations and tours of the Canadian National Vimy Memorial.

Social media posts will maintain and leverage high baseline levels of positive interactions on departmental channels to maximize exposure to memorial content. This will include educational posts promoting Canada's national and international memorials and linking specific memorials to commemorative dates (i.e., featuring information on The National Aboriginal Veterans Memorial on National Indigenous Veterans Day). Content will also be developed to better promote the stories of community-based war memorial restoration projects funded through VAC's Commemorative Partnership Program.

Through VAC's developing Canadian Armed Forces Around the World messaging framework, the department will also raise awareness of modern Canadian military milestones by ensuring that wreaths are regularly laid at The National War Memorial. Working with Veterans' organizations and stakeholders, VAC will continue to mark military milestones of the First and Second World Wars and the Korean War while also expanding engagement with Veterans of more recent missions. VAC will seek out new ways to engage communities in these activities and to share the experience with the wider Canadian public. As part of the April 9, Vimy Ridge Day ceremony in Ottawa, for example, VAC worked with Mamawi Together, an Indigenous organization dedicated to reconciliation, on a cleansing ceremony at The National War Memorial. The smudging of the monument occurred prior to the traditional wreath laying ceremony as a way to cleanse The National War Memorial and The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. VAC engaged with media to have this ceremony broadcast on television, expanding the reach and raising awareness.

Finally, VAC will leverage the ongoing project to create a National Monument to Canada's Mission in Afghanistan to support our broader memorial messaging goals. As the project moves ahead, strong communication planning will ensure that the high levels of public and media interest generated by the project are also used to increase public awareness of and dialogue about the important role memorials play in recognizing the contributions, sacrifices and achievements of our Veterans.