



KIP FRAZ, The Daily Courier

Wayne Ruskowsky patrols the halls at Okanagan College. The Virginia slayings have many education providers taking a second look at security.

Could it happen here?

■ **College, university balance openness with security; local RCMP recently trained for scenario similar to Virginia Tech slayings**

By CHUCK POULSEN

The Daily Courier

Kelowna RCMP members were among the first in the province last December to receive special training for just the kind of horrific situation that developed at Virginia Tech. Kelowna RCMP Supt. Bill McKinnon said 30 members from Vernon and Kelowna detachments were part of only two groups in B.C. that received training in what is called "immediate action rapid deployment."

"Members were trained in how to stop an active threat that is either causing death or grievous bodily harm," said McKinnon. "I think we're ahead of the curve on that. We were a pilot detachment for this. There were only two in B.C."

Three members of the detachment, who are Emergency Response Team members, did the training after receiving specialized instruction.

"We have emergency plans to cover almost



I look well ahead of the curve
Kelowna RCMP
Supt. Bill McKinnon

every situation, and we constantly update them," said McKinnon.

There has been criticism that police in Virginia not only didn't notify students of the imminent danger in time, but that when the effort was made, the only means of communications was e-mail.

Okanagan College spokesman Allan Coyle said there may be a lesson in how an alert might be put out faster.

Coyle noted that many, if not most, students carry cellphones.

"When OC students register, they all receive a 'My Okanagan' e-mail account," said Coyle, "but we could also be looking at blanket dialling out. You have to decide if there is the need for that kind of communications or if other avenues may work equally well. It (mass calling) might be an option."

Coyle said that five years ago, radio might

have been a more effective medium for getting the word out than it is now.

"You just have to look at all the Sirius (satellite radio) receivers there are in cars," he said.

Coyle said the Kelowna campus has security patrols on duty 24-7.

"They're obviously alert to anything that's going on on campus," said Coyle.

"We also ask students and staff to be alert to what's happening. We have security phones in various locations and video monitoring in a lot of the hallways and public places.

We liaise with the RCMP, so they are conscious of campus layout and classroom set up and that kind of thing.

"There's not much you can do to prevent someone crazy from doing something crazy, but we try to help people understand how to anticipate it and see it when it might be coming."

Security staff at OC and UBC Okanagan are not armed.

Central Okanagan school district chairwoman Myra Baxter said some high schools in the U.S. have armed guards and metal detectors, but the board has never discussed taking any measure even close to that.

"We haven't discussed having security guards," she said. "If we had them in our middle and high schools, there would be a tremendous expense for that."

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School security

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"That would be something we'd have to discuss with our school communities and find out if that is something students, parents and the community would want," said Baxter.

She said there are video cameras in some schools, but they are not monitored and are meant to catch people such as bicycle thieves or vandals after the fact.

As the result of a person who allegedly intruded into the girls' washrooms at several elementary schools, she said the district has begun locking all but the main doors.

There are police liaison officers who visit schools in the district, but, otherwise, no district school has a regular security guard.

"This is just so horrendous," said Baxter. "I can't imagine what the families down there are going through right now. I don't think there is anything you could do at a school in the security area to prevent something like this other than making it like Fort Knox."

She said that the school board met with the district student council Monday night and talked about security.

"I got the feeling that students didn't think we should be having our schools with armed guards," she said.

McKinnon said Sgt. Terry McLachlan works with OC, UBCO and the school district to develop plans in case something like this should happen here.

He said McLachlan met last week with Garry Appleton, who has taken over the head security job at UBCO.

"We have policies that have been developed over the years and are regularly updated," said Appleton.

"We have a good relationship with the local police department, so we come up with policies and procedures so that the safety and security of the students is utmost."

The Corps of Commissioners handles security at UBCO around the clock. Appleton said there has never been any thought given to arming the guards. "That's what we have a police force for," he said.

Baxter said the school system has to focus on potential school shooters before they act out their rage.

"I think what needs to be considered is how these people get to that state of mind without someone noticing, stepping in and offering support," she said.