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Firefighters to retool keys policy

Police try to figure out how thief got the difficult-to-copy master

KATIE DeROSA
Times Colonist

The Victoria Fire Department is reassessing its policy on master keys after one went missing and was used in break-ins across the city.

The 25 master keys give access to 530 buildings in the city in case of emergency. The department is talking about whether it needs that many keys and whether they can be kept in more secure locations at fire stations, said Fire Chief Jeff Lambert.

"We've done a complete review of our policy with the handling, security and placement of the keys, and we're revamping that to make it better," Lambert said. The fire department management and inspectors who carry keys must keep them on their person at all times and not leave them unattended in their vehicles, he said.

Keys should also be accounted for daily and a missing key should be reported immediately, he said.

Police are still trying to determine how the thief or thieves got the master key, since the fire department has accounted for all of its active keys.

Lambert speculated that one of the 12 surplus keys that were supposed to be destroyed ended up in the wrong hands. The keys are said to be hard to duplicate.

The fire and police departments were working together Wednesday after a breakdown in communication a day earlier, when the fire department did not inform police that it had found a master key they initially thought was missing.

"We're trying to be as open and transparent with them as we can so we can get to the bottom of the

issue," Lambert said. "Yes, there was conflicting information, and it was hard, because we definitely wanted to do the right thing and make sure the public got the right information. Moving forward, it's just a heads up that we need to do things better."

All 530 buildings with lock boxes that can be opened by the master key were re-keyed as of Tuesday night, Lambert said. Three of those buildings were federal government buildings including the Tax Services Office on Vancouver Street.

Victoria police have not said how many buildings were broken into using the master key, but they said it is partially to blame for a 28 per cent spike in commercial break-ins since January.

Police spokesman Const. Mike Russell said almost a dozen investigators are collecting evidence and identifying which buildings were entered without force.

A medical building at 1900 Fort St. was entered Saturday night. Using the master key, the thief opened a lock box, which contained a key fob that allowed access to the entire building. Cash, surgical equipment, two laptops and 11 computer hard drives containing patient information were stolen.

A medical commercial and residential building at 1831 Oak Bay Ave. had two lock boxes broken into Saturday night. In that case, the thief cut out the lock box instead of using the master key.

A 40-year-old suspect is being held in custody on unrelated warrants. Police believe there might be other people involved. They're also trying to recover stolen items.

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Rescuers came from nine communities on Vancouver Island to join in the search for 76-year-old Thomas Woods. On Wednesday, the search focused on the rugged terrain near Woods's home on Gillespie Road, in East Sooke.

After five days, searchers discover man's body in waters off East Sooke

Police see no sign of foul play in septuagenarian's death

DEREK SPALDING
AND SANDRA MCCULLOCH
Times Colonist

The five-day search for a missing East Sooke man came to a tragic end Wednesday when his body was found in the waters of Anderson Cove, near Gillespie Road.

Thomas (Tad) Woods, 76, went missing March 30 after he failed to show up at his daughter's home in the West Shore.

His body was found just after 11 a.m. Wednesday, about two kilometres from search headquarters near East Sooke. There is no indication of foul play in the death, which appears to have been an accident, said Staff Sgt. Steve Wright of Sooke RCMP.

About 50 searchers scoured the area near Woods's Gillespie Road home, walked the Galloping Goose trail, interviewed neighbours and trekked through dense forest.

"We go out and always hope the outcome is really positive ... I guess we are grateful we have some outcome as the family has closure, but it's unfortunate that this has happened," said Kathryn Farr, search-and-rescue manager from Juan de Fuca Search and Rescue.

The B.C. Coroners Service and Sooke RCMP are investigating the death.

Woods went missing on Friday, leaving behind his wallet, cellphone, keys and vehicle.

He was last contacted



Thomas (Tad) Woods failed to show up at his daughter's home in West Shore.

around 8:30 a.m. that day.

The RCMP were assisted by a full complement of search-and-rescue members on Friday and Saturday.

On Sunday, the search dropped to about 16 people.

Police have yet to provide details, but new information led to a second full-

scale search on Wednesday morning.

Rescuers came from nine Vancouver Island communities to assist in the search, said Farr, who coordinated the effort.

Search crews consisted of coast guard members on the water, hikers, and people on all-terrain vehicles and in a helicopter.

Wednesday's search focused on an area near Gillespie Road between the 17 Mile Pub and Roche Cove Bridge.

The rough terrain proved difficult for those hiking through the woods.

"We did everything from really gnarly bushwhacking. I'll be picking nettles out of my hands for days — walking the trails and knocking on people's doors," said Brian Donney of Metcheson Search and Rescue.

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F-35 billions, CBC cuts, mystery key and more



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Random thoughts on the last few days in news:

■ Ottawa's purchase price for 65 F-35 fighter jets has soared from \$9 billion to at least \$25 billion, causing auditor general Michael Ferguson to stop just shy of having a stroke in a scathing report released this week. The cost overrun alone would be enough to fund B.C.'s entire education system for more than three years.

This follows a 2010 report in which Ferguson's predecessor pointed out that the cost of new military helicopters had doubled to \$11 billion.

Meanwhile, the four used submarines that Canada bought from Honest Winston's New-To-You Warships in Britain have turned out to be the naval equivalent of one of those money pit houses-from-hell shown on Home and Garden Television.

Are we beginning to see a trend here? Canada's Department of National Defence: Good with guns, but stone cold killers with a calculator. As accountants, they make good soldiers.

■ Meanwhile, Stephen Harper — the man with a firm grip on the nation's purse strings, except when it comes to things that go bang — says you will now have to work until age 67, but don't go looking for a job

at the CBC because he's gutting its budget by \$115 million.

The news prompted Twitter users to swap tongue-in-cheek programming suggestions for a pared-to-the-bone CBC. Among the best: *Just Four Laughs*, *Republic of Dole*, *Quirks and Frazer Institute Research Findings*.

Among the Victoria contributions: *This Hour Has 12 Minutes* (Tom Hawthorn), *Degrassi Elementary* (Keith Baldrey), *As It Happened* (Andrew MacLeod) and *Hockey Hour in Canada* (the TC's Sandra McCulloch). Sandra also suggested the 10 a.m. time signal be shortened to a single beep.

My entry: *The Friendly Midget*. Sometimes I crack myself up. Sometimes I don't.

Somehow the humour didn't seem as funny Wednesday when the CBC announced it was

shedding 800 jobs.

■ There seems to be confusion about the whereabouts of a fire department master key that was used to gain access to Victoria buildings in which offices were burgled.

Has anyone checked under the planter/welcoming mat/big rock by the front door to the fire hall?

■ If the Girl Guides were crueler, they would sell the first box of cookies for \$5, and then, a week later when you're jonesing like a junkie, the second for \$50. More addictive than meth.

■ It was disheartening to learn that engineers have dispensed with one of the groovier features of the new Johnson Street Bridge. Pedestrians will not, as planned, be able to walk through the span's 200-tonne mechanical wheels as they lift the bridge.

The TC's Bill Cleverley points out that not only

would this have been an engineering first, it would have proved a tourism magnet drawing potheads from all over North America.

Stoners will now have to content themselves the old-fashioned way, watching jet planes take off overhead, just like on *Wayne's World*.

■ Tuesday's column was about the rapidly approaching (at least, rapid by historical standards) May 29 deadline for those wishing to see individual lighthouses granted protection under heritage legislation.

A petition has now been submitted by those wishing to safeguard Race Rocks, the 152-year-old jewel in the West Coast lighthouse crown.

The petition, submitted by Gary Fletcher, a retired faculty member from nearby Pearson College in Metcheson, does not guarantee protection, though. The Race Rocks light has been

declared surplus by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, which means heritage protection will only be granted if an individual or community group assumes financial responsibility for it.

Fletcher has been assured that the mere act of a submitting a petition doesn't bestow any such obligation on the petitioners.

Race Rocks is an historical and ecological treasure. To learn more, go to racerocks.com, where Fletcher is listed as educational director.

■ Organizers now say transgender Jenna Talackova may compete in the Miss Universe Canada pageant, a decision that upsets those who say Talackova should be barred because she has been surgically altered. Right, unlike those entrants with dyed hair, nose jobs, breast implants, Botox injections. ...

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