



THE CAPITAL AND VANCOUVER ISLAND

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Life-jacket laws urged in fishboat deaths

GEORDON OMAND
The Canadian Press

The federal government should look at the success of seatbelt laws when it considers a recommendation that would require commercial fishermen to wear a life-jacket at all times while on deck, the head of the Transportation Safety Board says.

The recommendation to make life-jackets mandatory was part of a report released Wednesday into the deadly capsizing of a 30-metre fishing trawler last year off the west coast of Vancouver Island.

"There was a time when it was OK to drive a car and not wear a seatbelt," Kathy Fox said after a news conference in Richmond.

"Regulations came in requiring it and now many people, if not all,

would probably say even if there wasn't a regulation they would still wear it."

Three men died and one survived when the Caledonian turned over and sank soon after it loaded what was to be its final haul of hake on Sept. 5 last year. The lone survivor was also the only one wearing a personal flotation device.

"Habits have to change," Fox said, describing the regulation as a necessary push in the right direction. "You never know when you could end up in the water. So let's be clear: All fishermen need to wear a PFD. And if making it mandatory is what it takes, then that's what the regulators need to do."

The board also wants all commercial fishing vessels, both large and small, to undergo a stability

assessment. The board's investigation determined the Caledonian overturned after its stability was compromised because of the way fuel and fish were stored on board, which was different from when it was originally assessed in 1976.

The report highlighted the risk of "weight creep," which it described as a tendency for boats to become heavier over the years, whether from modifications, saturated insulation or extra gear.

Transport Canada said new legislation that comes into effect in July would require stability assessments on all new small fishing vessels, as well as some existing ones.

But an email from department spokesman Daniel Savoie made no mention of amendments to life-

jacket regulations.

"Transport Canada strongly encourages everyone to wear a life-jacket or a PFD when on or near the water," Savoie wrote.

The safety board's report singled out WorkSafe B.C., which also plays a role in regulating the fishing industry on the West Coast. It recommended the provincial safety agency implement the same PFD requirements.

A WorkSafe B.C. spokeswoman said the agency takes the board's suggestion seriously and will respond within 30 days.

Pacific Seafood, the company that owned the Caledonian, said it appreciated the board's comprehensive investigation. "We are confident the TSB's report will help improve safety for all the fishermen and their families who

brave the sea every day," said Steve Spencer, president of the company's Canadian wing.

Ryan Ford of Fish Safe, a health and safety association for commercial fishermen in B.C., said the organization strongly supports the recommendations.

Fishermen have historically opposed wearing personal flotation devices because they were considered cumbersome safety hazards that could snag on equipment, Ford said.

But technology has drastically reduced that risk, he said.

"The benefits of wearing PFDs while working far outweigh the discomfort," he said. But it would still take time and effort to reverse a belief that is inherent to the culture of commercial fishing, Ford said.



PLEASE GIVE TO THE TIMES COLONIST CHRISTMAS FUND

Since 1956, this newspaper has collected money to benefit the less fortunate. Last year, through the Christmas Fund, we raised and distributed about \$320,000, and we hope to beat that total this year. We work with the Salvation Army and the Mustard Seed, which handle the disbursement of most of the funds, and also provide financial help to Our Place.

To donate, go online to: timescolonist.com/donate.

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Volunteer Margaret Schaffer sorts through gifts for the Angel Gifts program at Our Place on Wednesday. More than 750 personalized presents were given to people in poverty. DARREN STONE, TIMES COLONIST

OUR PLACE

Donations decline as meals increase

KATHERINE DEDYNA
Times Colonist

Donations to poverty-outreach centre Our Place have dropped since last year, even as it has served 100,000 more meals than in 2015.

If the better part of \$1 million is not raised in December, management might have to shut its doors in January at 6 p.m., not 9 p.m., said communications director Grant McKenzie.

The situation is "really concerning," he said, despite the generosity of local donors. "This time last year, we had brought in \$1.61 million in cash donations at the end of November; this year we are at \$1.45 million," he said Wednesday.

This year, 700,000 meals have been served so far, compared with 600,000 for all of 2015.

He attributed the drop in donations to several factors, primarily the "negative reaction" to the homeless encampment behind the Victoria courthouse for the better part of a year.

"People got fed up a little bit with what they saw at tent city. Tent city really focused on the negative aspects of homelessness rather than the transformative stories that we see at Our Place every day."

Most of the Our Place clientele — about 70 per cent — who seek meals and other assistance have housing, even if inadequate, but cannot afford both food and accommodation, he said. They include the working poor, impoverished elderly people and those with mental-health and physical challenges. The remaining 30 per cent have nowhere to live.

McKenzie also cited increasing competition for the charity dollar in everything from the Syrian refugee crisis, the Fort McMurray fire and ramped-up fundraising by other local charities. The cost of more

than 100,000 extra meals has been significantly absorbed thanks to Thrifty Foods, but more dairy products and high-protein foods had to be purchased.

The Times Colonist Christmas Fund provides funds for Our Place, and engineering firm Reid Jones Christoffersen provided a special breakfast Wednesday of sausages, eggs and hashbrowns, while Shell Canada anted up for Wednesday's dinner of roast beef and gravy, veggies and blueberry crumble.

For the past week, the centre has been open 24/7 due to the cold, McKenzie said, with hundreds of people there on Wednesday afternoon. Normal cold-weather hours are 6:30 a.m. to 9 p.m., so that homeless people have only a short wait until overnight shelters open. Shorter hours would save on staff and cleaning costs but "people would be left out in the cold," he said.

In 2015, donations largely from individuals contributed \$2.4 million to a total budget of about \$6 million.

Today, food services manager Brian Cox is preparing 450 kilograms of turkey, 325 kg of potatoes and vegetables, 110 kg of stuffing and 125 pies.

"I love it. The Our Place family really appreciates that we deliver such a special feast for them at this important time of year," Cox said in a statement.

"And for those people living in poverty, we're often the closest family they have," added executive director Don Evans. "We want everyone to know they are loved and cared for."

Local politicians, community leaders and volunteers will help serve.

Along with more than 1,600 meals every day, Our Place provides 45 transitional housing units, hot showers, free clothing, counselling and outreach services. kdedyna@timescolonist.com

MUSTARD SEED STREET CHURCH

Food-service budget down by \$210,000

CARLA WILSON
Times Colonist

The Mustard Seed Street Church is putting out a call for \$200,000 to help meet its food-services budget as donations lag from previous years.

The request comes as the church, which operates Vancouver Island's largest food bank, prepares to open 13,500 square feet of warehouse space next month. That initiative is expected to double the amount of donations coming in from supermarkets and social agencies in 2017 and thus assist more people in need.

Every month, the Mustard Seed distributes 2,200 food hampers, which serve 5,000 individuals.

Volunteers are needed to work in the warehouse, Allan Lingwood, church director of development, said Wednesday. More volunteers enable the agency to take in more food.

The Queens Avenue church's key programs are the food bank, Hope Farm Healing Centre, a family resource centre for single parents and a hospitality program aimed at the street community. It has a small congregation of about 50 people.

For the 2016-2017 fiscal year, which ends March 31, 2017, the church's entire budget is \$3 million, Lingwood said. The food-service component of that is \$1 million.

To date, \$1.5 million in donations has come in overall, he said.

But when it comes to the food-program portion of the budget, "We are generally behind in fundraising by roughly \$210,000 from this time last year," he said.

So far, donations directed to the food program stand at \$262,000, Lingwood said.

Donations to the church also help make up the food budget, he said. Typically, half of the money for food services comes in via

directed donations, with the rest from church funds, he said.

The Times Colonist Christmas Fund provides money to the Mustard Seed, the Salvation Army and Our Place.

Donations can be made at mustardseed.ca/donate-to-the-mustard-seed. Contributors can choose whether to donate to the church and all its programs, or to specific programs, such as the food service.

The new warehouse at 808 Viewfield Rd. in Esquimalt will be the food-distribution hub for the Mustard Seed and about 40 other social agencies, which together serve about 20,000 people.

Major food donors are Thrifty Foods, Country Grocer, Whole Foods and the LifeCycles Project Society.

About 1.75 million pounds of food were donated this year.

Lingwood anticipates that once the warehouse opens, donations will climb to 3.5 million pounds annually as capacity increases and big donors are able to send more food. Warehouse improvements were funded by the Victoria Foundation, Greater Victoria Rotary clubs and Thrifty Foods, he said.

"The fact is, there are way more hungry people out there than most people realize," said Derek Pace, food-security manager at the Mustard Seed. "The exciting thing is that we are implementing innovation solutions to meet that challenge."

A social agency report found that 30,000 people in the capital region are chronically food insecure. Groups initially targeted to receive assistance from the expansion are school-aged children, seniors, people with a disability and First Nations, the Mustard Seed said. cjwilson@timescolonist.com

> **Phoenix pay system blamed as United Way falls short of \$19-million goal, B5**