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Releases

Kitsilano Coast Guard Station Closed

VANCOUVER – The Canadian Coast Guard is closing the Kitsilano Coast Guard Station immediately – effective today, the union representing the Station crew has just been informed. Deputy Coast Guard Commissioner Jody Thomas informed the national office of the Union of Canadian Transportation Employees by telephone a short while ago.

In response, the UCTE, the Public Service Alliance of Canada-BC, the B.C. Federation of Labour, the Jericho Sailing Centre and other groups will hold an Emergency Vigil outside the Station at 5:00 pm today to protest this dangerous decision that will put British Columbians lives at risk immediately. Confirmed speakers include B.C. Federation of Labour Secretary-Treasurer Irene Lanzinger, Jericho Sailing Centre General Manager Mike Cotter, NDP MP Fin Donnelly, Mandip Sandhu, whose brother died in 2001 due to Coast Guard cuts and others to be named later.

National UCTE President Christine Collins says the federal government's decision is outrageous. "To suddenly close the Kitsilano Coast Guard Station that serves Canada's busiest port in the middle of the winter with no notice is simply outrageous," Collins says. "The federal government is not listening to British Columbians who have overwhelmingly rejected closure of this station – lives will be lost – that is what all the experts have said. But once again the government is ignoring the experts, as we have seen across Canada."

“I don’t want to be in the position of saying ‘we told you so’ when tragedy strikes, but that’s what this decision will mean,” Collins said. B.C. Federation of Labour Secretary-Treasurer Irene Lanzinger, who will speak at the vigil, says for the federal government to announce the closure on BC budget day is further proof that Ottawa has disdain for British Columbia.

Every BC political party, every nautical group, everyone who understands the dangers in these waters has said do not close the Kitsilano Coast Guard Station – and the federal Conservative government and its BC MPs have completely disregarded all the evidence that this is a deadly mistake,” Lanzinger said. “To do this on BC budget day shows that completely lack of respect knows no bounds.”

Bob Jackson, B.C. Regional Executive Vice-President of the Public Service Alliance of Canada, (UCTE is a component union of PSAC), said the timing is despicable. “Even after Vancouver City Council did a report stating clearly that most deaths and serious injuries in our harbour occur in the winter months, the Conservative government still closes this Station – it’s offensive and to do it on a day they think will minimize media coverage is even worse,” Jackson said.

BACKGROUND: The federal government’s decision to close the Kitsilano Coast Guard Station will leave the average 350 search and rescue operations each year to the Sea Island Coast Guard Station hovercraft in Richmond, 17 nautical miles and a minimum of 35 minutes away, or to volunteers who will have to leave their jobs, drive to stations and then launch.

Vancouver’s port is the busiest in Canada.

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Websites: www.ucte.com