



In crisis, under control

by Catherine Morrison

9/11 and Newfoundland's emergency procurement response

You may be in the middle of an emergency, but you still have to be in control of your supply acquisition and financial management processes,” says Fred Hollett, acting director of Emergency Measures for Newfoundland-Labrador.

Hollett had the unprecedented opportunity to test the truth of this principle during seven unforgettable days that began unexpectedly on September 11, 2001.

Hollett was in charge of coordinating Newfoundland's historic, and heroic, response to the sudden arrival of 13,000 international airline passengers diverted to the province's main airports as North American air space was shut down in the wake of attacks on the World Trade Towers and the Pentagon.

He quickly owns up to an incident that might be regarded as the proof in the pudding of his supply management dictum. Except that

we're talking sandwiches – thousands and thousands of sandwiches. Three times the number of sandwiches that could possibly be consumed, even by the thousands of tired and hungry passengers and crew who were slowly permitted to leave the aircraft, some of them as many as 28 hours after landing in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Maybe it's not surprising that orders for sandwiches for deplaning passengers some-

how got placed by at least three different agencies in the early hours of the emergency. It's certainly not surprising that the primary supplier involved exhausted *his* suppliers' stores of bread, deli meats, mayonnaise, etc. and that the supplier's neighbours and children had to be pressed into sandwich-making detail to meet the inflated demand, as Hollett tells the story.

Not surprising at all when you think about the number of partners involved in operating an emergency response. In this case, because of the unusual nature of the emergency, the provincial Emergency Measures Organization, under the department of Municipal and Provincial Affairs, was managing the activities of 10 federal and provincial departments and agencies, including Canada Customs and Revenue, Citizenship and Immigration, Transport Canada, the RCMP and Health Canada, as well as the provincial departments of Health and Community Services and Human Resources and Employment, and the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary.

Not to mention coordinating the voluntary efforts of dozens of churches and service clubs, municipal emergency measures organizations, Health Care Boards and airport authorities in St. John's, Gander, Stephenville and Goose Bay, and the four main communities hosted a final total of 80 aircraft.

Yet so remarkable was the coordinated response, apart from the sandwich glitch, that according to one provincial official involved in the effort, a "US army colonel, caught here on his way back from the Middle East, told our Premier that the US army could not have pulled off what Newfoundland and Labrador did for 9/11."

To welcome and cope with 13,000 unexpected visitors over seven days is a challenge that, by definition, assumes emergency proportions, particularly if you are a province like Newfoundland and Labrador, where the population totals just over half a million and is not based in large urban centres.

To comprehend the scale of the challenge, imagine that suddenly, out of the blue, over three quarters of a million people arrived at Canada's four major airports from all over the world and had to be accommodated for a week. That's three and half times the number of immigrants arriving in Canada during the entire year 2001.

Imagine that most of those unexpected visitors have no idea why their journey has



Salvation Army volunteers distribute sandwiches.

been interrupted and why they are being kept on board their aircraft as the hours tick by – children become restless, the airline's remaining on-board meals are consumed and the toilets start to fill up. And, once they are finally allowed to leave the aircraft, they are not permitted to take anything with them but the clothes on their backs. No change of clothes, no hand luggage, no familiar toys for the kids. Imagine a gauntlet of customs officials and immigration officials to be endured in your hungry, thirsty and weary condition.

And where on God's green earth, to scale back to the provincial reality on September 11, 2001, is Gander, Newfoundland – or Goose Bay, Labrador?

Quite apart from the nightmarish context that occasioned this emergency, the supply acquisition story that unfolded in its wake is one of epic proportions.

Imagine the impact of such an influx on an economy where almost everything, especially foodstuffs, has to be imported by air or by sea.

An estimated quarter of a million meals were provided to visitors during that week. That meant trucks on the road 24-hours a day, ferrying imported ingredients around to cities and towns where people had been taken from the four main airports. Bread baked in the town of Lewisport, for example, went from 300 loaves to 1,500 loaves a day, according to Hollett. Local companies donated "600 pounds of potatoes here and 100 pounds of beef there,"

he says, but such gifts could never have kept pace with the need.

Schools and community centres required 5,000 cots to sleep those who couldn't be put up in hotels and private homes. Three thousand of those had to be flown in by the Department of National Defence. Thousands of blankets were distributed by the provincial department of Human Resources and Employment, working with Health Canada.

And before long, says Elizabeth Horwood, director of Human Resources for Human Resources and Employment, who was heavily involved in the coordination and implementation of the emergency social services component, a delicate situation began to arise: thirteen thousand people unable to change their socks and underwear.

Fred Hollett tells the extraordinary story of how that particular supply acquisition challenge was solved, and it wasn't through normal purchasing channels.

Seems that one of the visitors sidelined in St. John's was John Ryan, vice-president for International Marketing for Wal-Mart. When Ryan was made aware of the need by one of Hollett's staff, he made a quick call to Wal-Mart's US headquarters and came back with some astonishing news. In Newfoundland, wherever there was a need and a Wal-Mart store, officials should proceed directly to the socks and underwear departments and load up on what they required. "There was never a bill," says Hollett.

Medical needs presented both expected and unusual challenges. Three 200-bed mobile hospitals were deployed in St. John's, Gander and Stephenville. Before long, people who had been sleeping in strange beds – even on floors – and people from other cultures who had been consuming an unaccustomed Canadian diet, began to feel poorly.

More serious was the situation involving those with medical conditions who had not been able to bring their medications off the planes. Emergency medical assessments were carried out and pharmaceutical stores accessed across the province.

Requirements were broad, and costs began to mount. Free telephone services were set up so that people could call home and let worried families know they were safe. No distinction was made between those who might easily have afforded to make the calls, and those “without two nickels to rub together,” says Hollett.

Busses and other vehicles were needed. The Newfoundland Association of Public Employees, whose bus drivers were on strike at the time, suspended the action so that busses could be put in service.

Oliver Langdon, the provincial minister responsible for emergency measures, says that costs to mount the response would have run into the hundreds of millions had it not been for the nearly 6,000 volunteers who pitched in with their services and opened up their homes.

As it is, direct costs have been estimated at \$2 million over that eventful week, much of it paid in reimbursements to service organizations, which would otherwise have been “wiped out” because of their contributions, says Fred Hollett.

The province has been attempting for over a year to recover some of those funds from the federal government, which diverted the planes to Newfoundland in the first place, says Langdon, and has a responsibility to make good on what Newfoundland and Labrador paid out on an emergency basis.

One senior provincial official thinks this was one of the most effective \$2 million expenditures the province has made for a long time. The impact on the province has been noticeable. There are, of course, the anecdotal stories of friendships forged, libraries endowed and scholarships established through the gratitude of those who were welcomed

Costs related to purchases of goods and services for emergency response

Transportation and communications	\$12,000
Supplies (food and other costs)	\$12,000
Purchased services (accommodations, meals, telephone services, bus and vehicle rentals, etc)	\$1,000,000
Equipment	\$2,500
Grants (reimbursements to health care boards, municipalities, school boards etc.)	\$655,000

Newfoundland and Labrador 911 response facts

Number of passengers and crew received	13,000
Average stay in Newfoundland and Labrador	6 to 7 days
Number of meals provided	250,000
Number of 200-bed mobile hospitals deployed	3
Number of cots required in St. John's and Gander	5,000
Number of volunteers engaged	5,000 to 6,000
Number of gorillas arriving in a cargo hold at Gander	2

Where the planes landed

Goose Bay	5 planes, 816 passengers and crew
Gander	38 planes, 6500 passengers and crew
Stephenville	7 planes, 1108 passengers and crew
St. John's	27 planes, 4200 passengers and crew
Deer Lake	1 private plane, 5 passengers and crew

Source: Province of Newfoundland and Labrador: Emergency Measures Organization, and Human Resources and Employment.

into Newfoundland and Labrador hearts, homes and school gymnasiums.

But the other story everyone seems to be talking about is the impact on tourism, thanks to widespread media coverage beamed around the world for days on end. There is a lot of anecdotal evidence of an increase in tourism, particularly from the US, since 9/11, says Julie Bettney, the provincial minister for tourism. “This is what I hear in the crafts stores and bed and breakfasts. However, we have quite deliberately not zeroed in on 9/11” as a measurable root of this increase, she says. What is known is that tourism enquiries from around the world have increased by 40 percent since 9/11. Enquiries from New York City alone increased by 29 percent in 2002.

But the media coverage has done much more than bring increased tourism dollars into the province. Alison Earle was assistant deputy minister for Human Resources and Employment at the time. She says the real impact lay in “what it did to advertise (in a very positive and human way) what Newfoundland and Labrador is all about, but also

what it did for people in the province in allowing them to react so amazingly in a crisis.

“We had a way of reacting at a time when everyone else around the world was paralyzed in front of their TVs. We could reach out and help, we could show that there is good will in the world, and that we can work to help one another,” says Earle.

“It was also good for people in this province, who are so used to seeing themselves portrayed as have-nots and losers or takers in the country, getting to show the world what we are really made of. Not only are we hospitable, but we are also amazingly well organized and can pull off such a great effort with very little warning.”

Catherine Morrison, a writer based in Chelsea, Quebec, has been published in the Ottawa Citizen and the Globe and Mail's print and online editions, as well as in Canadian Consumer, Asia Pacific Magazine, the Edmonton Journal and C.A.R.P. Magazine. She was a full-time writer/broadcaster for CBC Network Television and CBC TV and Radio, Winnipeg and a contributing editor and columnist for Winnipeg Magazine.