

Battering rams to pedometers

PUBLIC WORKS AND Government Services Canada's published a request for tenders that specifies "one (1) ply toilet tissue" for Canadian Forces Base Trenton, ON. Who knows what kind of waste there would be if troops had the luxury of two-ply? Delivery "shall be made within one (1) day for urgent/high priority requests," the request for proposal says. Imagine if a soldier's too shy to say it's urgent!

Perhaps knowing the army is spending \$5.8 million designing a high-tech helmet for them helps soldiers overlook one-ply toilet paper. Canadian Press says the three-kilogram helmet is to contain a video camera, radio system, night-vision equipment, gas mask and global positioning system.

From high-tech to low ... police recently arrested protesters occupying the prime minister's Montreal office. The CBC says protesters objected to an incinerator being built

across the Baie des Chaleurs from Quebec, at Belledune, NB to treat contaminated soil shipped from the US. Did Montreal police use ho-hum pepper spray to quell the protest? No sirree, a battering ram. They balked at saying why they own a battering ram or how they defined the specs to buy one, but apparently it's not unusual.

Calgary police readily talked about their "mechanical breaching tool," which they use on barricaded doors at marijuana grow operations. They're quite polite with it – always knock three times first, says spokesperson Brad Swidzinski. If they weren't so polite, they might have saved the City of Calgary some cash. In February, council voted to pay \$356,900 for the local Hells Angels clubhouse to make way for a traffic interchange. The Calgary Herald reports the price includes an \$11,900 acquisition fee plus \$29,000 for built-ins – wet bar, steel-screened windows, steel-plated doors and steel fence.

But instead of building interchanges, perhaps Calgary should follow the lead of Moncton, NB and PEI and their efforts to get people out of their vehicles. With obesity topping governments' worry lists, jurisdictions are turning to the prosaic pedometer as just the thing to keep Canadians fit. As it's becoming apparent the sleek "baby boomers" of the '80s have become middle-aged and podgy, Health Canada is working on a national "healthy living strategy." One suggestion at a brainstorming session was, "de-normalize over-working," because long hours at a computer also makes us fat. Ironically, someone else proposed they "revisit the *ParticipACTION* model as the basis for a social marketing strategy and develop a social marketing campaign (radio, TV, publications) to change attitudes and convince people of the importance of healthy living." Remember *ParticipACTION*? *ParticipACTION* ads started goading Canadians in 1971, saying a 60-year-old Swede was as fit as a 30-year-old Canadian. Starved for Health Canada funding, the program died in December 2000.



Photo courtesy of New-Lifestyles Canada

Enter the pedometer, an effective motivator because it offers immediate feedback. Serious researchers intone, "pedometers are socially acceptable," and point out an accurate pedometer won't let you lie about your effort. Doing research on behalf of her clients, Ottawa Valley diabetes educator Lee-Anne Kennedy did more than just reach for a cereal box containing a step counter. "Entry level pedometers introduce the concept, but the biofeedback is not accurate enough," she says. The gold standard is the Digi-Walker.

To simplify importing the Digi-Walker from the US, Kennedy became an online distributor. Her company, New Lifestyles Canada, struck a partnership with the City of Moncton. Moncton bought 2,000 Digi-Walkers at a bulk price of around \$23 and added a support program for citizens, coached by fitness professionals. Community Development Officer Marie-Claire Pierce says 600 people have bought the \$45 packages in the first dozen weeks.

Moncton adapted PEI's *Stepping Out* program, part of the island's bid to become the fittest province. PEI contributes \$10 towards each pedometer – 1,500 last year and 2,700 so far this year, including 800 Grade 7 to 12 students. PEI in turn based *Stepping Out* on the seminal work of Dr. Catrine Tudor-Locke (University of Western Ontario), who created a structured program to teach diabetics how to increase their exercise effectively.

Out in BC, the provincial government has funded a two-year pedometer-based pilot program in schools. University of British Columbia researcher Heather McKay's *Action Schools! B.C.* will blanket the province next year to fuel a culture of activity and sport anticipating the 2010 Olympic Games. "We made pedometers available to 900 elementary school students and their teachers. They were extraordinarily popular," McKay says. So popular, in fact, some kids pocketed them ... perhaps they'll grow up fit enough to wear a three-kilogram helmet.

That's it for this month. Time to walk to the postbox to pick up my own Digi-Walker. I can use it when I sneak out for ice cream in a sincere bid to de-normalize over-working. *mm*

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Grose, Francis. "The Antiquities of England and Wales," 1783

