

RCMP spent \$1.2 million investigating SNC-Lavalin in one year

BY AARON DERFEL, MONTREAL GAZETTE, MONTREAL GAZETTE NOVEMBER 14, 2014

Public Works and Government Services Canada (PWGSC) concluded a contract in 2009 with SNC-Lavalin for the management of RCMP detachments and other buildings across the country.

“The level of client satisfaction with the service provider appears to be satisfactory,” a document by the RCMP states, adding the “RCMP position is that the relationship with PWGSC/SNC-Lavalin is maturing.”

That agreement was in place until 2013, but could be extended until 2015.

Information about the property management agreement between the RCMP and SNC-Lavalin — and a possible extension until next year — appears in a document obtained through an access to information request filed by Ottawa researcher Ken Rubin.

That access request reveals the RCMP spent \$1.27 million of taxpayer funds investigating Quebec engineering firm SNC-Lavalin in the last fiscal year.

The Mounties could not give a breakdown of the costs associated with their investigation into allegations of bribery and fraud by SNC-Lavalin in procuring contracts in Libya, Tunisia and Bangladesh.

“Our systems in place at present do not allow us to obtain a more precise amount,” RCMP access-to-information coordinator Sylvie Brazeau wrote in her response.

RCMP agents earn from \$82,000 to \$139,000 per year. Those salary numbers would suggest about a dozen investigators might be involved in the SNC-Lavalin probe.

However, Cpl. Sherley Goodgie, of media relations in the RCMP’s national division, cautioned against drawing that conclusion.

“When we’re talking about an investigation, we’re not just talking about the investigators doing the investigation,” Goodgie said. “There’s travelling, there are sometimes hotel costs.

There are so many things that need to be factored in. You won't get an accurate idea of how many investigators are in this."

The RCMP launched their investigation into the global engineering conglomerate in April 2012, when officers raided SNC-Lavalin's Montreal headquarters. Since then, the wide-ranging RCMP probe has resulted in the arrests of at least eight former SNC-Lavalin executives.

The RCMP have also worked with Quebec's Unité permanente anticorruption (UPAC) police squad in its probe into the awarding of the \$1.3-billion contract to SNC-Lavalin to build the superhospital of the McGill University Health Centre.

Three former SNC-Lavalin executives — including ex-CEO Pierre Duhaime, Riadh Ben Aïssa, who had served as a vice-president of the company's international division, and Stéphane Roy, once the financial controller for the firm — face criminal charges arising from the superhospital contract.

During a conference call with investors and reporters last week, Bob Card, CEO of SNC-Lavalin, was asked about any potential settlement the company might be negotiating with the RCMP in connection with bribery or fraud charges.

"We continue to enjoy constructive relationships with all of our counter-parties but I am not able to go into any detail about what we might be discussing," he said in the conference call.

Asked whether the fact some of the RCMP's buildings are being managed by SNC-Lavalin might have an effect on the force, Goodgie responded: "As the SNC-Lavalin investigation is still ongoing, the RCMP national division will not comment any further."