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Auditor General - Spring 2013 Report Released

Ineffective operation and management of the Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal mechanical branch amounts to a failure to protect public property and resources, Auditor General Jacques Lapointe said in his spring report released today, May 22.

The auditor general said his review of the mechanical branch locations at Miller Lake in Halifax Regional Municipality and at Truro uncovered a large number of operational weaknesses and control breakdowns. Over the years, management has not corrected problems despite being aware of them.

“Controls and processes to safeguard inventory – parts and other equipment – and to ensure the equipment is well maintained and properly repaired either do not exist or are ignored,” Mr. Lapointe said. He added there was no documentation to indicate whether inventory variances had been investigated at Miller Lake and in Truro variances were not investigated. Poor inventory controls risk loss of expensive equipment through error or theft.

Senior management of the department says it is now in the process of reviewing operations and implementing new controls.

An audit of aspects of the child welfare program at the Department of Community Services found processes to investigate allegations of abuse or neglect were adequate, but investigations were not always started or completed in a timely manner. One quarter of the investigations examined had gaps in activity of three weeks or more.

“Lapses in this work impair the department’s ability to protect children’s interests,” Mr. Lapointe said. Children placed in care may be placed with regular foster families, and the audit found regular foster family screening adequate but slow. The auditor general said there is little guidance available to Community Services staff when screening kinship families – relatives or close acquaintances of the child.

The audit also found contact between Community Services and children and foster families did not always occur as frequently as it should. The Children and Family Services Act has an outdated definition of neglect and does not cover all children to age 18; the department will not commit to legislative changes.

The auditor general examined eight agencies, boards and commissions and found expense claim issues at all of them. Controls over expense claims were weak, supporting receipts were missing, and approval processes were inappropriate.

Mr. Lapointe recommended Treasury Board ensure all agencies, boards and commissions tighten their procedures with regard to expense claims.

The auditor general said the government's performance in implementing recommendations made in his past reports remains poor and indicated that "senior managers in government are failing to correct known deficiencies in their programs."

He said the government's public update on its implementation performance once again contains numerous errors, rendering the update unreliable.

"While I commend the government for reporting on its performance, the credibility of that reporting is compromised by inaccurate information."

Only 41 per cent of recommendations made by the auditor general in 2010 have been implemented. The 102-page spring report contains 76 recommendations and is available at www.oag-ns.ca.

FOR BROADCAST USE:

In his spring report, Auditor General Jacques Lapointe says mechanical branch operations at the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal are deficient.

The report identifies many problems at vehicle repair centres, including poor inventory control and failure to perform preventive maintenance. Mr. Lapointe says departmental managers have been aware of the problems for some time, but failed to act.

His report also criticizes the Department of Community Services for delays in completing investigations into child abuse or neglect allegations and for irregular contact with children in foster care.

The report identifies weaknesses in expense claim processes at government agencies, boards and commissions, and says the government's record in implementing past auditor general's recommendations remains poor.

The 102-page spring report contains 76 recommendations to government and the full report is available on the auditor general's website.

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