

THE PRINCE GEORGE CITIZEN

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CITIZEN PHOTO BY DAVID MAH

HAZARDOUS SPILL — Prince George firefighters were called to 7th Avenue near the Travelodge Goldcap to deal with a pool of acid. For more on the story, see page 3.

Greyhound apologizes for hitchhike advice

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Greyhound Canada has responded to a complaint after a stranded passenger in Burns Lake was advised by an agent of one of the bus company's call centres to hitchhike to catch up to the Prince George-bound bus.

Grant Odsen, regional manager of passenger service for Greyhound Canada, said the company will pursue disciplinary action against the Texas-based customer service representative as well as the bus driver who left behind Evelyn Williams, who was using a restaurant washroom during a rest stop and missed reboarding the bus Jan. 4 in Burns Lake.

"Obviously, we are deeply concerned about it, and we certainly apologize to Ms. Williams and the unfortunate incident she's had to go through," said Odsen.

"We're not about to authorize any employee or a contract personnel to advise anybody to be hitchhiking. Certainly it's not the service we would expect our employees to be giving and certainly Greyhound

has not and is not about to be recommending that any customer of ours is hitchhiking on the Highway of Tears, or some other location, and we are taking steps to ensure that's never done again."

Otherwise known as Highway 16, the road which connects Prince George to Burns Lake and Prince Rupert has gained notoriety because it is connected with the unexplained disappearances of numerous women over the past four decades. Many of the missing women were last seen hitchhiking. Greyhound has launched an investigation into the incident which involves its senior manager of national customer service. Williams was so shocked to receive the agent's advice she asked for and received her employee number, which has helped the company track down the source.

"From my understanding, Ms. Williams was talking to a staff member in a customer service office that I believe is not an employee of Greyhound," Odsen said.

"We've got call centres that



WILLIAMS

provide information and the people responsible for that area of business are looking into that right now. We want to identify who might have been saying something like that. We're taking it seriously right up to the highest level. We will take the action we feel is necessary to make sure it doesn't happen again."

Greyhound requires its drivers to do head counts at each stop to make sure no passenger gets left behind and Odsen is convinced the driver

who rolled into Burns Lake with Williams aboard failed to do that.

"The two issues are not something we expect out of our employees in either case," Odsen said. "Certainly we expect our drivers to do head counts and that was the first mistake. The driver has been identified and we will be going through the disciplinary process with him on that."

Odsen said the severity of sanctions against the driver could range from a disciplinary letter to dismissal, depending on how his explanation weighs against the facts the company has gathered.

Williams went to the Prince George Greyhound terminal a week after the trip and reported the incident to regional agency manager Lyn Potts. Potts encouraged her to file a formal written complaint and promised Williams the company would refund the full price of her ticket from Prince Rupert and would reimburse her friend the gas money spent to make a round trip from Prince George to pick Williams up that night in Burns Lake.

As in many small towns, there is

no bus terminal in Burns Lake.

Greyhound picks up and drops off passengers and freight at other established businesses, which most often are open only during the daytime. According to Williams, the driver announced to his passengers he was stopping for five or 10 minutes. Williams said she left for six minutes to use the washroom of a nearby grocery store when she came out to see the bus rolling down the street a block away.

Odsen has yet to speak to the driver but said he has no reason to doubt Williams's version of the story.

In the case of stranded passengers, Odsen said the company will try to make alternate travel arrangements to get them to their intended destination that day.

"Normally, in a situation where somebody had been inadvertently left behind at a stop we would normally pay for other transportation to get them in, whatever happens to be available," he said. "There is a [taxi] cab in Burns Lake and had we known we would have tried to procure the cab to take her in."

Victoria Towers renos underway

Ted CLARKE Citizen staff

Northern B.C.'s largest subsidized housing project is still a few months away from completion.

Renovations still have to be completed before the 12-storey Victoria Towers project on 20th Avenue will be ready to accept new tenants.

"There was a lot of cleaning out to do, and the building is all cleaned out of the junk we needed to get cleaned out and now we're full steam ahead with getting this done," said B.C. Housing regional director Malachy Tohill.

"There's a lot of work to do in that building and we want to make sure that we keep it up to a good standard so it provides affordable housing in the future."

A fifth-floor fire in November 2011 left most of the building uninhabitable, forcing 94 tenants to look for new homes. In October the province announced it had

purchased the building for \$7.8 million with the promise it would invest an additional \$3.2 million to complete renovations.

B.C. Housing will manage the apartment complex, which will include bachelor, one-bedroom and two-bedroom units. Renovations were originally expected to be completed by the end of March but Tohill said the building won't be ready for new tenants likely until the summer.

"I'll have a better idea of that when the consultant and the contractor give us some timelines and the full scope of work we need done," said Tohill.

"It's got to be brought up to a pretty good standard for us. We've already been through the building and have a good idea of what we need done. I would hope we'll have it fully finished and have people moving in by the summer, but if we can get it done before that we will push to have that done. This is a top priority."

— see B.C. HOUSING, page 5

Pills were culprit, Cook tells Mr. Big

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The man facing several charges in the death of his stepson in Prince George a dozen years ago told an undercover police officer posing as a crime boss that the boy had overdosed on drugs supplied to him through his biological father, the court heard Friday.

Lloyd William Cook has pleaded not guilty to one count each of manslaughter, criminal negligence causing death, unlawful confinement and interference with a dead body in the January 2000 death of Adam Scott Williams-Dudoward in Prince George.

In October 2004, Adam's mother, Judy Elaina Williams, went to RCMP with her story and helped police uncover the boy's body, buried in a shallow grave in a wooded area south of Miworth. And starting in April 2008, Cook was the target of a near

yearlong undercover operation, known as a Mr. Big sting, in which officers posing as organized criminals take the suspect through a progression of tasks and scenarios designed to gain his trust.

The culmination is a meeting with the crime boss, or Mr. Big, in which the target is urged to provide the full details about his alleged crime so he can help make the problem go away. On Friday, the court saw a video of such a meeting in which Cook was urged to tell his story.

Cook admitted leaving Adam in a bedroom after his hands and feet had been bound because he had been misbehaving.

But he maintained his death was due to consuming a baggy containing yellow pills and that his younger brother had snuck them into the home earlier that evening after the biological father had passed them onto him while he had been playing out in the back yard.

— see COOK, page 3

Today's Weather

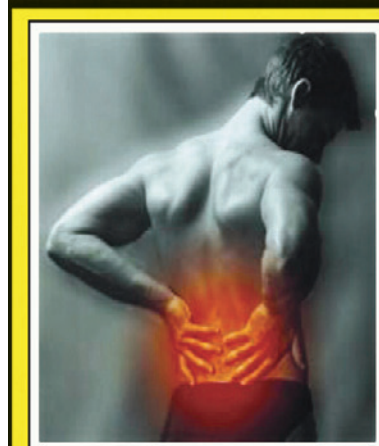
Hi -1°
Low -11°

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