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Canada's screening at 'minimum'

WHO points to airport measures

Some countries deploying sensors

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OTTAWA—The World Health Organization may call for countries around the world to toughen airport screening for SARS and says Canada is doing only the minimum already recommended.

"We wouldn't criticize Toronto, they're following the minimum the WHO has recommended, said Jon Liden, spokesperson for WHO director general Gro Harlem Brundtland.

"But they're not doing more than the minimum as far as I understand, and other countries are doing much more."

He pointed to other countries that have deployed thermal-imaging sensors designed to stop people with fevers from boarding planes.

Liden said the WHO is taking another look at screening guidelines already in place.

"In order to help countries with this crisis as it continues we may consider looking again at our advice on how to screen outgoing passengers."

Canadian officials have said they're looking to Singapore to possibly acquire devices to detect SARS symptoms among travellers — even as a Canadian high-tech firm that builds such equipment can't get Health Canada to return its calls.

"We're disappointed, very disappointed," said Mark Mandell, vice-president of Vancouver-based Cantronic Systems Inc. "We've got a great product and we want to sell in Canada."

Cantronic has been getting requests from all around the world for its thermographic camera, which costs about \$36,000, including Hong Kong, Malaysia, Spain and Singapore.

But nothing from Canada.

A spokesperson from the Greater Toronto Airports Authority said Health Canada is the sole agency responsible for dealing with SARS.

Cantronic, which says it has received grants from the federal government's National Research Council, is one of just a handful of world manufacturers of thermographic cameras that use infrared technology to measure a subject's body temperature and provide an image.

Similar technology has been deployed at Singapore's Changi International Airport. The infrared sensors there are built by a Singaporean company.

Health Canada has stated it is interested in the devices and Canada's high commissioner in Singapore has gathered information from authorities there. "Additional information is being sought so this equipment can be obtained," a spokesperson for the Canada's foreign affair's department said.

The device is seen as a positive step to ensuring that passengers don't carry the disease around the world on airplanes.

A spokesperson for Health Canada said the department is monitoring the efficacy of airport measures taken in other countries. "But the measures in place at this time at airports in Canada are considered adequate," said Ryan Baker.

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