

Government Orders

tronic technology that both reduces costs and improves service to the public.

Another example of communications technology introduced by Public Works and Government Services and which has growing application in the federal service is the use of electronic or E-mail. It now links more than 120,000 public servants across the country.

E-mail provides a system for exchanging information that is fast and efficient and that significantly reduces the paper burden within the government. It facilitates quicker decision making and faster service and it saves money, an estimated \$55 million per year in time saving and improved efficiency.

Public Works and Government Services has also introduced during the past year a national video conferencing service. This service is now offered to all government departments and agencies at seven Public Works and Government Services sites across the country. Based on the enthusiastic demand for this new service, the department plans to expand to as many as 20 sites in the near future.

A major client of this new service will be Radian, the public service learning and communications network. This network's mandate is to save the public service time and money by encouraging long distance learning and video conferencing throughout the federal government which would then save on the costs associated with travel.

Although still in its early stages of development, this new service shows great potential for improving communications between various government departments across Canada at greatly reduced cost. It responds to the government's goal of cutting costs through the creative application of new technologies.

Members present may recall that in the autumn of last year and the spring of this year, the human resources development committee spent a great deal of time communicating with people across the country in an effort to establish a baseline of concern over the new social service review.

Part of that discussion and consultation employed this innovative new use of technology. I am pleased to say that the first witnesses to testify came from Windsor, Ontario. Instead of spending in excess of \$8,000 to bring those witnesses to Ottawa, we were able through the use of this technology to spend substantially less and not to disturb them or have them travel.

The human resources committee will commence travelling on November 14 to all parts of the country in an effort to speak to people in their own locale and to see the situation across the country. While we are there we will continue to use video conferencing reaching even further into the country in order to give everyone an opportunity to be heard on this very important subject.

Through this technology the public works department has allowed us to communicate directly with Canadians and Canadians to communicate back directly with us in a very real form of direct democracy.

This department has also been active in expanding the application of new technologies in its business dealings with thousands of Canadian companies and individuals. As the prime procurement agency of the government, Public Works and Government Services purchases an average of \$10 billion of goods and services each year on behalf of as many as 150 federal departments and agencies.

The department has instituted a number of automated systems to make this process more efficient and less costly to the government and to its suppliers. One of these is the recently established open bidding system or OBS.

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This system provides an electronic bulletin board as well as a tri-weekly publication called "Government Business Opportunities" which is designed to give Canadian businesses fast and equal access to information about government contracting opportunities.

The adoption of OBS represents a major step toward fulfilling the government commitment to provide a contracting system that is fair, open and transparent. However by reducing the paper burden involved it also saves taxpayers an estimated \$3.5 million annually.

This is one further example of how the application of electronic technology cannot only improve services but cut costs as well. Another application of technology in the business field is the department's electronic procurement and settlement system known as EPS. EPS links client departments within government to the suppliers and to a central control system allowing them to do business electronically, including ordering without requisitions, supplier payment without invoices and electronic journal vouchers without paper forms.

When this system is fully in place within the very near future, it will result in massive savings to the government and the taxpayer, estimated in the range of \$176 million. It will create even greater savings for private sector suppliers, most of which will be passed along in the form of lower prices for government purchases.

These examples of the steps being taken to improve efficiency and service through new technologies indicate clearly that our government is living up to its commitment in this area. They also indicate the key role that the Department of Public Works and Government Services is playing in the process.

Initiatives such as the one I just described mean even more efficiency in government operations, better services to the