

THE BENEFITS OF COSICS

You are nicely installed in your SQ in Baghdad, books unpacked, pictures on the wall, kids in school, when you get the word that you are being cross-posted to Oslo. Help! Where are the winter clothes? Are the skis in long-term storage or at Grandma's house? Inventory time again... you go to the COSICS terminal, type in a command and out comes a freshly-printed copy of your inventory in a new format telling you exactly where everything is, what its insurance status is, etc. The day before your departure, you are back at the terminal making last minute changes to the inventory for the new move. When you are finished, you enter another command and within minutes your inventory has arrived in Ottawa.

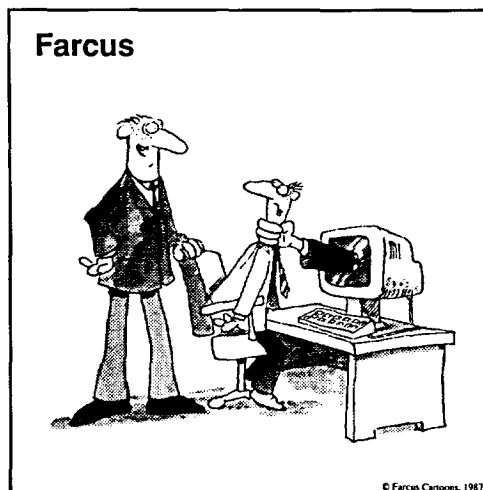
Sound like a dream? With the introduction of the Department's new computer system, COSICS, it will be business as usual. COSICS (Canadian On-Line Secure Information and Communication System) has attracted the interest of other countries, as well as other departments, because of its capacity for dealing with both classified and unclassified information. Its system is called "All-in-1", because it integrates electronic mail, word processor, spreadsheet, appointment book and database in one system.

In May, technicians began installing the first terminals in the Permanent Mission and Consulate General in New York, as well as in selected units in Ottawa, for the first on-site tests. By the end of the year, the system will be running in most of Canada's missions in the United States. Other regions of the world will be added at 12- to 15-month intervals, starting with Europe, followed by Asia-Pacific, Latin America-Caribbean, and finally, Africa-Middle East. Eventually each employee will have a terminal connected to a printer which will be shared by four to eight terminals. Initial training on the system will last up to five days, with follow-up training, customized manuals, in-

dividual computer-based training, and a phone-in "help" line also available.

COSICS will make a tremendous difference to communication, especially between Canada and posts which, until now, have had to rely on the diplomatic bag for almost everything. At this stage, it is not clear how widely the system can be used for personal reasons, or what kind of access dependents might have, but if you are cross-posted, you should be able to contact the administration officer directly to work out housing, schools, or employment; your inventory, stored in the employee's 10 megabytes of personal storage, can be updated and transmitted directly to Travel and Removal. COSICS should eliminate some of the frustrations of foreign service life. The Department is looking at whether it could be used for sending the kinds of messages that are a consequence of foreign service life, say, to your bank manager, to a friend at a distant post, to the spousal employment officer, or to your child's boarding school -- instead of waiting for the next bag.

The system certainly has potential. Now is the time to visualize how COSICS can benefit you, both employee and foreign service family. If you have ideas or questions, speak to the COSICS co-ordinator at your mission or in Ottawa.



It's our new computer security system!