

*Government Orders*

● (1315)

Hon. members will know we have faced tremendous challenges to deliver on our promises to Canadians and that the Government of Canada has worked hard to manage our priorities since 1993 in order to succeed. I hardly think this debate is the appropriate forum to trot out the list of our accomplishments but if members opposite wish me to do so I will be more than happy to.

Departmental officials had to review their work to prepare their memorandum to cabinet concerning the amendments to the Explosives Act we have before us today. Consequently the officials made the necessary revisions to meet the demands of a new government. The officials have done an excellent job.

The 1991 convention signed in Montreal represents an international agreement to combine efforts among nations to reduce the risk of any further aircraft bombings. Participation in this effort is viewed by Canada as an essential element in the continuing battle against terrorism.

Like all international agreements, the convention on marking of plastic explosives is based on trust among signatory nations. Canada respects this spirit. Canada is known around the world as a leader in encouraging progress to increase the trust among nations that leads to progressive international conventions.

We have every intention of living up to all of our international obligations in the hopes that other countries will follow our example. This is not a blind trust; this is the essence of good leadership.

At present there is no way to detect plastic explosives in airports, while conventional explosives materials can be detected by equipment at our airports. The act proposes the marking of plastic explosives by adding a chemical which would be detected by equipment in Canada's international airports and thus ward off the threat of terrorism.

The amendment would allow Canada to be among the first nations to ratify an international convention requested by the United Nations and co-ordinated by the international civil aviation organization with respect to the marking of plastic explosives.

The convention was signed in March 1991 by 40 countries, and 14 countries have already ratified the convention since April 1992. Five of these nations, Norway, Spain, Switzerland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic, are producer states where plastic explosives are manufactured.

Given that Canada is a world leader in vapour detection technology, Canadian equipment manufacturers will be able to take advantage of international market opportunities for their vapour detection technology as more and more countries ratify the convention.

Plastic explosives have emerged as a weapon of choice among terrorist groups for bombing aircraft and other targets such as public buildings because this type of explosive is small, powerful, stable, malleable and, most important, difficult to detect.

If plastic explosives are marked or tagged with a substance that can be detected by equipment at Canadian airports, it is quite likely that terrorists would be discouraged from attempting any attacks in Canada using plastic explosives.

The convention on the marking of plastic explosives requires states to ensure the marking of plastic explosives to enhance their detectability. The convention also requires controls over the import, export, possession and transfer of marked plastic explosives and the destruction of most unmarked plastic explosives.

Let me remind the House about the main features of the convention. Only plastic explosives as defined in the convention are required to be marked. Existing unmarked commercial stocks of plastic explosives are to be destroyed within three years. An international explosives technical commission will be created to assess technical developments.

The cost of Canadian participation in such a commission will be low and the convention will come in force after 35 states including the 5 producer states have ratified it. Canada is one of the world's producer states and by passing the proposed legislation before the House today Canada will be among the first countries to ratify the important convention.

Looking at other departments, the military has agreed it can except perhaps in times of emergency observe all of the terms of the convention. Priority will be given to the use of unmarked stocks of plastic explosives in the military stock of explosives materials. As always, tight security of storage facilities will be maintained. In addition, tight accounting procedures regarding the use of all stocks will also be maintained.

● (1320)

Transport Canada, responsible for the operation of detection equipment at Canadian airports, has indicated current technology can detect the marked plastic explosives.

The extra cost of producing detectable plastic explosives is expected to be negligible. This is primarily due to the relatively low volumes of plastic explosives manufactured in Canada. The industry has been working in co-operation with organizations involved in the effort to develop substances to mark plastic explosives for the purpose of detection. Therefore the industry acknowledges the impact of extra costs will not be that serious.

In addition, given the low volumes of plastic explosives compared with the volumes of conventional industrial explosives, the challenge of enforcing the provisions of this proposed amendment and by extension the international convention will