

COMMUNICATIONS

There are currently no plans to adopt standard SIGNET at a number of small missions with 10 to 20 users as the cost per user of providing this service is considered as being too high. Reduced versions are being contemplated using alternative technology. No detailed plans have yet been made for small missions with fewer than 10 users; current SIGNET funding extends only to the provision of a single on-line PC (plus backup) with dial-in connection to SIGNET.

Since it is important that small missions with fewer than 10 users be given the tools required to reduce their workload, MSD should come up with a plan outlining alternative solutions which should be thoroughly discussed with Geographic AMAs who have already prepared a detailed list of requirements for each small mission within their Branch.

MSD should provide Geographic Branches with precise information on the difference in costs between partial SIGNET and full SIGNET. This will allow them to establish priorities and in some cases they may try to identify means of funding the difference as it is imperative that some of the small missions be equipped with full SIGNET.

CONSULAR & PASSPORT SERVICES

Canadians expect service where there is an official Canadian presence, especially consular services and this regardless of the size or mandate of the mission. Consular services are a core function of the department. It is important, therefore that each mission have the capability to deliver an appropriate range of consular services.

At this time there is no departmental consensus across geographic or functional units as to what consular functions should be included as service elements in "single" purpose offices (ie trade offices in such locations as San Francisco or Guangzhou) or smaller "full service" missions. As a first step, an agreement should be reached with Geographic Branches on the type of consular functions that each mission is expected to deliver. A determination of "full service missions" and "partial service missions" should be made and responsibilities for each type of mission should be clearly outlined. Once this is done, a list of all missions with their responsibilities should be included in consular publications.

Consideration has been given to relieving Canada-based officers at small missions from duty officer requirements by automatically transferring after-hours calls to a neighbouring mission, or to the Watch Office or the Emergency Response Office (depending on the hour of the day) in Ottawa through either MITNET or an ordinary phone line. This system has already been implemented in the US and savings of US\$300,000 were realized last year in overtime costs. The same system should be considered in the case of small missions although an assessment of costs should be made first for those missions which are not equipped with MITNET, given that they would be responsible for paying the long distance costs.

Other options include adding LEPs as part of the duty officer roster and ensuring that the after hour message on the answering machine clearly states that the duty officer will only attend calls which are of an urgent nature and which cannot wait until the next working day. A careful analysis of the resource implications of the first option (routing calls to Ottawa) should be carried out by geographic branches, JPO and ISO and proposals should be put forward.