

Canada-U.S. Blog

LEGAL DEVELOPMENTS AFFECTING CANADA-U.S. CROSS BORDER TRADE

Dogs at the Border – What the Canada Border Services Agency Dogs Are Trained to Sniff

By Cyndee Todgham Cherniak on September 3rd, 2015

Posted in Border Security, Customs Law



The television programs about border security and border patrol have four legged stars – the sniffer/detector dogs. To be honest, I like the commercials with the sniffer/detector dogs sniffing the envelopes in the mail center – junk mail, junk mail, junk mail, LSD? These short commercials are helpful in communicating to the public at large for what items the sniffer/detector dogs are searching.

The Canada Border Service Agency (“CBSA”) uses sniffer/detector dogs (also called K9s) for a number of purposes. Sniffer/detector dogs are used at airports, land border crossings, ports and at mail centers. You may encounter the sniffer/detector dogs when you step off the aircraft, when you are at the luggage carousel, during secondary inspection or when you are waiting to board a plane to leave Canada.

The sniffer dogs are trained to detect certain types of goods, such as:

- prohibited drugs;
- prohibited weapons (e.g, guns);
- currency over \$10,000 (yes, they can smell money);
- agricultural products (e.g., prohibited meat, fruits, dairy, etc.); and
- data storage devices that might contain prohibited images.

The detector dogs find things that humans might not be able to find. They alert their human handlers when they find the scent that they have been specially trained to detect. The CBSA handlers inform other CBSA officers who are tasked with conducting the secondary inspection.

For example, the dogs that are trained to detect large amounts of currency are used for passengers leaving Canada (who must report exports of currency over \$CDN 10,000) and in the Customs Controlled Area (arriving passengers must report imports of currency over \$CDN 10,000). These detector dogs will be brought by their CBSA handlers to the passengers and the dog will signal (often by sitting down) when they detect the scent of paper money). If the detector dog sits down next to a passenger, that passenger is asked by the CBSA handler to go to an inspection area where he/she is asked to provide to the CBSA officers all their currency. Usually two CBSA officers are present so that they will not be accused of taking any of the money. If the passenger has less than \$CDN 10,000, he/she may be allowed to board their flight (or

another flight if the inspection caused the person to miss their scheduled flight). If the passenger has more than \$CDN 10,000 the CBSA will seize all the currency in the passenger's possession and apply the applicable penalty.

While I cannot say for certain that the CBSA has detector dogs who are able to find computers, hard drives and USB keys, we have learned from the Jared Fogel case in the United States that a detector dog (e.g., Bear) has been trained to detect electronic devices. It has been reported that Bear's trainers worked with scientists to isolate scents associated with electronics. It is reasonable to expect detector dogs with this skill will be utilized by the CBSA at ports (to sniff out such contraband on large ships) and in mail centers.

While the detector dogs cannot testify in court, their human handlers can testify in court. These CBSA officers are trained to be able to speak up for their K9 partners.

Tags: Canada Border Services Agency, CBSA, customs dog, detector dog, K9, sniffer dog

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